

Kinship care in New Brunswick

1st Edition



Information and support
for people caring for, or
considering caring for, a
child or youth they have a
close relationship with.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

This guide is designed to support kinship care providers, and your feedback helps us make it better.

Please share your thoughts, suggestions, or questions anytime by visiting socialsupportsnb.ca/feedback or scanning the QR code below.



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Understanding the child or youth's needs

Practical tips for building routines, supporting emotional needs, and recognizing trauma in children and youth.

When a child or youth comes to live with you through kinship care, it can be an emotional and overwhelming time for them. Leaving their home, family, and familiar routines is a big adjustment. Many children and youth in kinship care have gone through hard experiences like abuse, neglect, trauma, or separation.

As they adjust, they may have a lot of different emotions. These feelings can come from the pain or uncertainty they've experienced. They may also have mental health, developmental, or learning challenges (diagnosed or undiagnosed) that can affect how they cope.

It's important to understand how hard experiences like this can affect how child or youth act, think, and feel. This type of understanding is called trauma-informed care.

How to support the child or youth

Trauma-informed care focuses on creating a safe and caring environment where children and youth can feel secure and start to heal. This means knowing that behaviours, even challenging ones, often come from fear or pain.

By being patient, kind, and consistent, you can help the child or youth feel supported as they adjust to living with you.

Every child or youth copes with change in their own way. Below are common challenges they might face, what to watch for, and simple ways you can help.

Remember, you are not alone!
Professional support can make a difference for both you and the child or youth. Counsellors, psychologists, family therapists, school support staff, or even supportive family and friends can help when you need it. If you're not sure where to start, talk to your social worker for advice.



| *Why it matters:*

Children and youth in kinship care often carry the effects of trauma from past experiences, such as neglect, abuse, or separation from their parents. These challenges can affect their mental health, emotions, and behaviours. Supporting their emotional and mental wellness helps you build trust, promote healing, and teach coping skills they can use throughout their lives.

| *What to look for:*

- **Mood changes:** Sudden shifts in mood, including anger, sadness, or irritability.
- **Sensitivity:** Overreacting to small issues or being easily startled (hypervigilance).
- **Social withdrawal:** Avoiding family activities or social interactions.
- **Trust issues:** Difficulty trusting adults or adapting to routines.
- **Physical symptoms:** Complaints like headaches or stomachaches without medical reasons.
- **Sleep problems:** Nightmares or trouble sleeping.
- **Behaviour or appetite changes:** Noticeable shifts in eating habits or school performance.

| *How you can help:*

- **Reassure them:** Use comforting words like, “You’re safe here” or “It’s okay to feel this way.”
- **Create outlets for expression:** Let them express their feelings in ways that are comfortable for them such as drawing, journaling, music, or storytelling.
- **Encourage healthy coping activities:** Introduce activities like physical exercise, art, or quiet time.
- **Maintain routines:** Consistent schedules for meals, bedtimes, and family activities can build a sense of stability.
- **Be observant:** Watch for patterns. For example, behaviours may change after visits with parents or during emotionally significant times, like holidays. Offer extra comfort when needed.
- **Provide safe spaces:** Give them a quiet place to retreat when they feel overwhelmed.
- **Reach out for professional support:** If you or the child or youth is struggling, consider connecting with a professional, such as a counsellor, therapist, or school support staff. Talk to your social worker about connecting with professional resources that can offer additional support.



Understanding grief and loss

| Why it matters:

Grief and loss are common experiences for children and youth in kinship care. They may struggle with feelings of sadness, anger, confusion, or fear as they adjust to being separated from their parents or family. Supporting a child or youth through their grief helps them process their emotions in healthy ways, build resiliency, and promote healing.

| What to look for:

- **Sadness:** Feeling down or upset for longer periods of time.
- **Anger or fear:** Reactions that seem intense or unexpected.
- **Behaviour changes:** Withdrawing, acting out, or becoming more defiant.
- **Trouble with school:** Struggling to concentrate or falling behind in learning.
- **Sleep problems:** Difficulty sleeping or experiencing frequent nightmares.
- **Emotional triggers:** Strong emotions around visits, holidays, or special dates.

| How you can help:

- **Validate their feelings:** Reassure them that it's okay to feel sad, angry, or confused. Use phrases like, "It's normal to feel this way after something so hard."
- **Create safe spaces to express emotions:** Let them share their feelings in their own way, such as talking, drawing, journaling, or play.
- **Provide consistent reassurance:** Remind them they are safe and loved in your care.
- **Stay patient and supportive:** Grief is a process and may take time. Offer gentle guidance and remain open to their needs.
- **Encourage healthy outlets:** Introduce activities like art, music, or physical activity to help them release emotions and process their grief.
- **Seek professional support when needed:** Grief can sometimes feel too big to manage alone. Counsellors or therapists can help the child or youth work through their emotions in a healthy way. Your social worker can help you access these services.



Building emotional connections

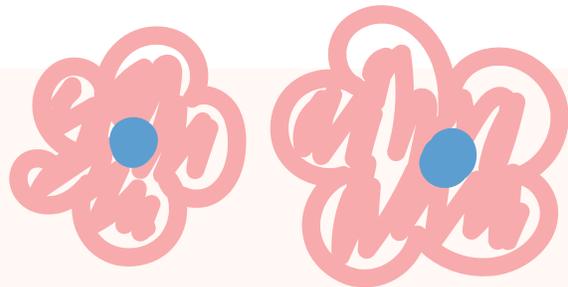


| Why it matters:

Children and youth in kinship care often navigate complex feelings around their relationships and sense of belonging. These emotions may come from missing their parents, adjusting to a new home, or feeling torn between loyalties. As a caregiver, your support helps build trust, strengthen bonds, and create a stable foundation for their emotional well-being.

| What to look for:

- **Guilt or self-blame:** Feeling like they are responsible for being separated from their parents.
 - **Sadness or confusion:** Struggling to understand or cope with past family experiences.
 - **Mixed emotions about bonding:** Difficulty forming a relationship with you while feeling loyal to their parents.
- **Respond gently:** Use reassuring phrases like, “It’s okay to miss your parents, and it’s okay to feel safe here with me.”
 - **Address guilt with empathy:** Say things like, “This isn’t your fault; you didn’t cause this to happen.”
 - **Encourage expression:** Let them process their feelings at their own pace through drawing, journaling, writing, or talking.
 - **Celebrate their progress:** Recognize their efforts with positive feedback, such as, “I’m proud of how you shared your feelings today.”
 - **Reach out for professional support:** If you or the child or youth is struggling, consider connecting with a professional, such as a counsellor, therapist, or school support staff. Talk to your social worker about connecting with professional resources that can offer additional support.





Creating stability with routines

| Why it matters:

Consistent routines help children and youth feel safe, supported, and in control of their environment. Predictable schedules can reduce stress, promote healthy habits, and strengthen your bond with them as their caregiver.

| How you can help:

- **Set consistent schedules:** Establish regular times for meals, chores, bedtime, and family activities.
- **Use visual aids:** Create sticker-based charts, weekly planners, or simple calendars to help them understand and follow routines.
- **Give transition reminders:** Offer gentle cues before changes, such as, “In 10 minutes we’ll start getting ready for bed.”
- **Provide small choices:** Allow them to make decisions to feel more in control, like picking a bedtime story or choosing their breakfast.
- **Build traditions together:** Create meaningful rituals, like a weekly family movie night or a special morning routine.
- **Guide through reminders:** Offer supportive prompts to ease transitions between activities.



Supporting identity and culture

| Why it matters:

Honouring and celebrating a child or youth’s identity and culture is essential for building confidence, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting pride in who they are.

| How you can help:

- **Celebrate their culture together:** Engage in activities like cooking traditional meals, listening to music, exploring language, attending local events, or celebrating cultural holidays.
- **Learn about their heritage:** Take the time to educate yourself about their cultural background, especially if it differs from your own.
- **Include meaningful traditions:** Ask which routines, customs, or traditions are important to them and incorporate these into your family life.
- **Connect with their community:** Introduce them to groups, mentors, or events that share and support their cultural background.
- **Highlight cultural identity at home:** Display items like books, art, or decorations that reflect and celebrate their culture.



Navigating behavioural challenges



| Why it matters:

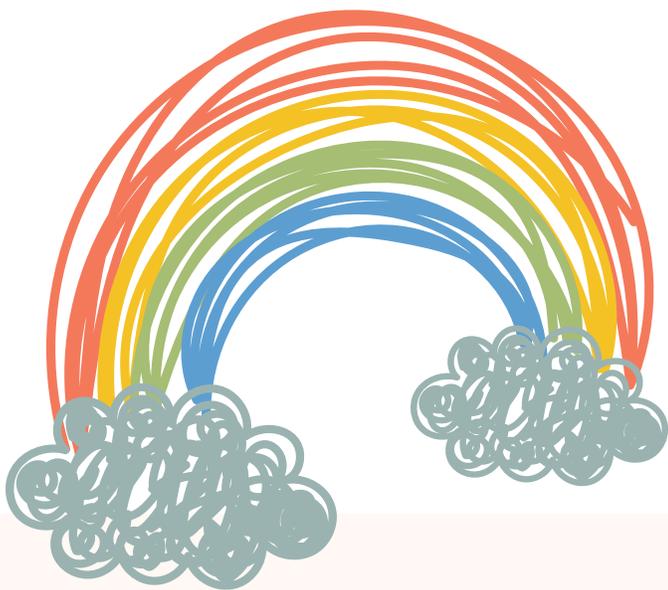
Children and youth in kinship care may display challenging behaviours as they process emotions and adapt to new caregiving arrangements. Understanding the root of these behaviours and responding with patience and consistency can help them feel secure and supported.

| What to look for:

- **Acting out:** Behaviours such as hitting, yelling, or tantrums.
- **Testing boundaries:** Refusing to follow rules or challenging limits you've set.
- **Difficulty focusing:** Struggling to concentrate or stay on task.

| How you can help:

- **Stay calm:** Take deep breaths or step away briefly to gather yourself before responding.
- **Praise positive behaviour:** Recognize their efforts and offer rewards like stickers or extra playtime to reinforce good behaviours.
- **Set clear expectations:** Establish consistent boundaries to create a predictable environment.
- **Help them process emotions:** Support them in naming and understanding their feelings, such as frustration or sadness.
- **Model healthy coping strategies:** Demonstrate techniques like deep breathing or problem-solving to help them manage challenges.
- **Reach out for professional support:** If the child or youth is struggling with challenging behaviours, consider reaching out to a professional, such as a counsellor, therapist, or behavioural specialist. Talk to your social worker to explore the resources and supports that are available.





Encouraging open communication

| Why it matters:

Open communication is key to building trust and understanding. When children and youth in kinship care feel heard and supported, they are more likely to share their thoughts, process their emotions, and develop healthy relationships. By fostering an environment where it's safe to talk, you can help them navigate their experiences and build confidence in expressing themselves.

| How you can help:

- **Give them time:** Allow them to open up at their own pace without pressuring them to talk.
- **Listen without judgment:** Validate their emotions by saying things like, "That sounds upsetting. I understand why you'd feel that way."
- **Ask open-ended questions:** Encourage conversation with prompts like, "What was the best part of your day?"
- **Model openness:** Share your own emotions in ways that are age-appropriate to show that it's okay to talk about feelings.
- **Create non-verbal outlets:** Offer alternatives like journaling, drawing, or other creative activities to help them express their emotions.

Training and education opportunities

To better prepare you for the challenges of supporting children and youth, consider taking advantage of available training and resources:

- **PRIDE training (Parent Resources, Information, Development, and Education):** This online program covers trauma, attachment, supporting developmental needs, and behavioural strategies. It helps foster, adoptive, and kinship care providers better understand the experiences of children or youth in their care and offers practical suggestions. If you are interested, contact your social worker.
- **Workshops or events:** While the NB Adoption Foundation's programs are designed to support adoptive parents, kinship care providers are welcome! Connect with others who share similar experiences and learn new caregiving skills. *For more information, visit the [NB Adoption Foundation's Adoption Support Network website](#) (or search online for 'NB Adoption Foundation Adoption Support Network').*

