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## Adoption and Guardianship for Children in Kinship Foster Care: Comparison Chart User Guide

**Purpose:** This brief tool is for child welfare case workers and other professionals who work with kinship foster families. The goal is to provide a checklist of lessons learned in sharing relevant information with kinship caregivers, and how to approach the discussion of adoption and guardianship as two legal options for the families.

**Accessing Charts:** A national comparison chart and several state comparison charts are available for use without charge at [www.gu.org/resources/adoption-and-guardianship-for-children-in-kinship-foster-care/](http://www.gu.org/resources/adoption-and-guardianship-for-children-in-kinship-foster-care/). If there is a chart for your state, share that one with the families. If not, use the national comparison chart – but make sure the families understand that it is a general resource and there are nuances in each state. A limited number of print copies of the charts may be available from Generations United by request by emailing [gu@gu.org](mailto:gu@gu.org).

### Tips for Sharing the Charts with Families:

- **Share Information Early and Often:** Begin talking about adoption and guardianship with kinship caregivers early in the child's placement with them. Share the comparison chart and revisit the conversation at appropriate intervals. It is not a one and done conversation. These families have been through a traumatic experience to cause the parents to be unable to parent. They may not be able to absorb information all at once.
- **Be Intentional About Presenting Balanced Information:** During the discussions about adoption and guardianship, walk through the chart with the families and present the two options in a balanced way:
  - Do not weigh in on which one is better without exploring all the legal and financial ramifications with the families and listening to their opinions.
  - Remember they are the true experts on their family.
  - During your discussions, explain the child welfare system, the child's plan, and the possibility that the child may not be able to go back to the parents.
- **Acknowledge Power Dynamics:** Kin often feel powerless, as they do not have complete autonomy to make placement and permanency decisions. There is a built-in power dynamic between the child welfare agency and those experiencing the child welfare system. Acknowledge these dynamics and feelings and support them while they navigate how to best care for the child. If you are from the government child welfare agency, refer them to community-based agencies and peer supports when possible, for additional support and follow-up.

- **Focus on Family Strengths and Full Family Engagement:** When working with families, focus on their strengths and try to get “buy-in” from the parents when possible to encourage them to actively participate in planning for their child’s future alongside the kinship caregiver.
- **Check Your Own Biases:** Check your own feelings, biases, and prejudices. This may include punitive attitudes towards the parents, or cultural biases and assumptions related to race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. Remain nonjudgmental and genuine in your approach. Above all, acknowledge and respect the child’s attachment to their parents and their family.
- **Be Sensitive to Trust Issues:** You may encounter reluctance by some kin to become permanent caregivers and change legal relationships due in part to complex family dynamics and mistrust of systems. These concerns may be related to historical and ongoing experiences with discrimination or other negative experiences with systems intended to help. Despite reluctance, remember decades of research shows that children do better with kin as compared to non-kin placements. They have better behavioral and mental health outcomes, greater stability, and are more likely to report that they always feel loved.
- **Learn About Cultural Differences:** Respect the parent and kin’s opinion about their own family, as well as their culture and diversity. Show respect and empathy for all family members by taking the time to learn and understand the family’s past experiences, current situation, and concerns. [Learn more about working with Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native, and African American grandfamilies.](#)
- **Develop Strong Community Collaborations:** Develop strong relationships and referral processes with community organizations, including any mentioned on the legal chart and in the relevant state’s GrandFacts Fact Sheet found at <http://www.grandfamilies.org/State-Fact-Sheets>

View and share [additional resources on Adoption and Guardianship for Kinship Foster Families.](#)

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