.

**Foster Carer Smoking Policy**

There is a great deal of evidence which shows that second hand smoke can seriously harm children and young people; it has been linked

[(http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree) to ischemic heart disease, cot death, middle ear disease and asthma. Further to this, there is the increased risk of house fires associated with smoking and smoking materials, including lighter fuel, matches and lighters.

Over recent years, there has been increasing restrictions placed upon foster carers who smoke, by both the authority following BAAF guidance and through nationwide legislation (BAAF Practice Note 51), to limit the harm that tobacco smoking can do to children. Derbyshire has now implemented the position recommended by BAAF so that no one who smokes can foster any child under the age of 5 years, any child with a condition which would be affected by smoking (e.g. asthma) or any child with a disability.

Derbyshire County Council acknowledges that we have many skilled, experienced and able carers, providing secure and loving homes to children in care, who are smokers. However, the safety of our children in care must come first and the following procedures should help to minimise the impact on smoking on children, in smoking households.

Consider stopping smoking. The harm caused by cigarette smoking is well documented, both to the health of the smoker and those around them. Children who live in a household where people smoke are more likely to become smokers themselves. There is a wide range of schemes available now to help people quit – carers can find out more at  [o](http://smokefree.nhs.uk/)r speak to their GP for free support and advice.

If a carer smokes at home, they should try to make their home as smoke free as possible. Smoke outdoors rather than indoors – if a carer must smoke within the house, they should keep to one area of their home and ensure that is well ventilated. Carers must never expose a child or young person to excessive smoke and ensure that when guests who smoke, visit their home, that they smoke away from children.

When children in their care visit friends or relatives, and wherever possible, they should try to make sure that the same care to preventing them being exposed to smoke is taken. Never smoke in a child’s bedroom or whilst playing, dressing or washing a child. A child’s lungs are far more susceptible to harm from smoke.

Never smoke in the car when children are present. Smoking in a confined space, even with the window open, concentrates the effects of smoke. Avoid smoking in front of children. Young people are far more likely to take up smoking if they see it as part of everyday life within their household and the less aware of it they are then the less likely they are to start. Carers will also be expected not to leave cigarettes or tobacco in public view and to make sure that matches and lighters are kept securely, out of reach from children.

If carers do smoke in the house, make sure that the room in they use has a working smoke detector, to minimise the risk of fire. It is an unfortunate but acknowledged condition that some older children in care will smoke. From October 2007, the government raised the minimum age to buy tobacco from 16 to 18 years, with a fine of up to £2500 for any shopkeeper found selling to young people under that age. However, the authority does accept that there will be children coming into care who do smoke.

Carers can help the child they care for to go smoke free, by contacting their Looked After Children’s Nurse. If a child is able to stop smoking, encourage and support them in this even if they start smoking again. It is only with the encouragement of carers, whilst they are living in a fostering household, that they stand the best chance of quitting. If they know a child in their care is smoking, they should ask them where they got the tobacco products from. If a shop or retailer is selling cigarettes to underage children, it is recommended that the carer contacts Derbyshire County Council’s Trading Standards department on 08456 058 058.

Make sure that a child is aware of not only the dangers and risks of smoking to themselves, but also to the people that live with them and care for them. If a young person persists in smoking, rules should be put in place as to where and when they can smoke, in line with the recommendations above for carers who smoke.

If a young person is placed in a household where carers smoke, smoking together is not to be encouraged – a young person is far more likely to continue smoking, if they are in an environment where smoking is seen to be condoned. Furthermore, cigarettes and tobacco should **never** be given as a reward or gift to a child in care.

**Vaping and E-cigarettes**

E-cigarettes have a battery powered heating element that heats a solution containing nicotine to create an aerosol that can be inhaled (‘vaping’).

E-cigarette use is an evidence light area and much guidance is based on consensus.

It is estimated that 3.6 million people in the UK use e-cigarettes (MRHA, Drug safety update Jan 2020).

**Health concerns**

E-cigarettes produce various chemicals, many of which are toxic to the lungs. They have not undergone long term safety trials and it will take many more years to tell if e-cigarettes will cause respiratory diseases like COPD or lung cancer.

Population studies have shown that e-cigarette use doubles the chance of chronic cough, phlegm and bronchitis compared with those who do not use e-cigarettes. E-cigarette users are also more likely to get respiratory infections and take longer to recover from them.

There does not appear to be a significant risk of harm to those breathing in second-hand vapour. However, users should avoid vaping infront of children (of all ages) to avoid role modelling vaping behaviour.

**Safety**

E-cigarettes have a heated component and are therefore a fire risk; the risk is low, with fires much commoner with conventional smoking.

E-cigarettes have a lithium-ion battery, there have been rare reports of devices exploding.

The e-liquid is poisonous if swallowed so it is advisable to keep it away from children in a container with a safety cap. There is also a risk of the liquid being used in self harm or suicide attempts.

Advice is to only buy e-cigarettes from reputable outlets, use the correct charger for the device and do not leave an e-cigarette charging unattended or overnight.

**Current cigarette smokers**

It is estimated that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than normal cigarettes.

E-cigarettes can be used to maintain a smoke-free home where possible.

NICE guidance suggests that adults who want to use e-cigarettes to quit smoking are advised to use them long enough to prevent a return to smoking.

Findings of a recent study suggests that nicotine containing e-cigarettes are more successful at helping smokers quit than other forms of nicotine replacement, and are even more effective when combined with behavioural support. Therefore, current smokers are encouraged to seek professional support from ‘Stop Smoking’ services.

**E-cigarettes and young people**

Currently there is no evidence that e-cigarette use in young people leads to smoking of conventional cigarettes.

Despite the low risk of harm from vaping compared to cigarettes, they are still addictive products containing nicotine and it is important that children do not start vaping.

Children with parents who vape are more likely to be exposed to e-cigarettes and have positive views about vaping.

Large surveys have found that most young people who experiment with e-cigarettes are unlikely to go on to use them regularly, and regular use in those who have never smoked is very low.

**Summary**

There may be long term health consequences of vaping/e-cigarettes that we do not yet know. However, the current opinion is that they are much safer than conventional cigarettes, and current smokers should be encouraged to switch to e-cigarettes where possible.

Those who are only using e-cigarettes should be considered as ‘non-smokers’ according to NICE guidance.

Parents and carers should be aware of the safety risks related to e-cigarettes and liquids.

The risk to bystanders of ‘second-hand’ e-cigarette vapour is extremely low.

Vaping should still be done away from children and young people, to reduce their exposure to role modelling of vaping behaviour.

(Vaping and e-cigarette guidance updated July 2023)