**Staff behaviour when working with children, young people or young adults v3**

The standards are underpinned by the following:

* Staff are employed in a professional capacity and carry out work on behalf of the council.
* They are not the carers, that role is carried out by the person(s) with parental responsibility, foster carers, carers in residential settings
* As such, even when staff are with children, young people and young adults (primarily care leavers in this respect) there is always a professional relationship that is not a relationship with a carer
* Some of the children, young people and young adults we work with have complex vulnerabilities which we at all times should be sensitive to and support them with

**General principles**

1. Social workers and support workers perform their duties to meet the needs and requirements of children, young people and young adults.  Work does not take place in order to meet the needs of members of staff who carry out the work.

*Social workers and support workers must understand therefore, that they have privileged access to young people.  They have a professional role which brings with it ethical and practical responsibilities which they must respect and adhere to.*

1. Children, young people and young adults have a right to place trust in the relationship that they develop with a worker.  Many children, young people and young adults who access children and family services are vulnerable and are in need of support.  There will always be an unequal power relationship between the adult worker and the child, young person or young adult.

*Workers must not abuse the balance of power in the relationship and must be very careful to establish and maintain clear boundaries to the relationship, which are understood by the young person.  This involves ensuring that a proper professional distance is maintained in the relationship between the worker and child, young person or young adult so that relationships of friendship or dependence are avoided*

In order to maintain proper professional standards therefore, workers must not

* Develop physical or sexual relationships with children, young people or young adults who are, have been or could be associated with their work
* Develop friendships, outside of working time, with children, young people or young adults with whom they are working or have worked with (see para 6 below)
* Use language that is inappropriate or could be misconstrued by children, young people or young adults
* Behave physically in a manner which could be misconstrued by children, young people or young adults
* Condone, support or participate in, behaviour exhibited by children, young people or young adults that is illegal (including the use and/or supply of illegal drugs), unwise from a safety point of view, or which is discriminatory or oppressive to others (see Herefordshire Council’s Equality and Diversity Policy)
* Behave in a manner that is disrespectful of the physical or emotional privacy of children, young people or young adults.

2. In support of the general principles above, the following provides guidelines for some specific scenarios.

2.1 Alcohol and drugs

Staff should not drink alcohol or be under the influence of alcohol whilst working. This includes during breaks in their working day.  Similarly staff should not be under the influence of illegal drugs or psychoactive drugs known as ‘legal highs’ when they arrive for work or if they are on call.

Staff should not drink alcohol in the presence of children, young people or young adults who they are working with in any situation which could be linked to their work.

They should not purchase alcohol for children, young people or young adults they are working with or have worked with.

2.2. Meals

Workers should exercise caution when having meals with individual children, young people or young adults and it should be avoided where possible. It is understood that there are occasions when contact with a young person is best undertaken in a setting where there is food available. If this is the case, the worker must discuss it in supervision.

**2.3 Smoking**

It is recognised that smoking, both actively and passively, is harmful to health. Staff have a professional role to act as a positive role model and set a good example to children, young people and adults who they are working with.

No member of staff shall at any time smoke or vape in the presence of any child, young person or young adult they or their colleagues are working with in any situation that could be linked to their work.

If a child in care or care leaver is already a habitual smoker, the health care plan shall address what efforts are to be made to encourage the child or care leaver to give up the habit.

No member of staff shall supply smoking materials to any child, young person or young adult.

Children, young people or young adults who do not smoke should be actively discouraged from developing the habit through an appropriate health education programme.

3. Smoking or drinking alcohol when off duty

It is acknowledged that staff may unintentionally come into contact with children or young people they are working with or have worked with when they are not working and are in a social environment.

If this happens when they are off duty and staff are themselves smoking or drinking alcohol, staff should be polite but take steps maintain appropriate boundaries.

They should not purchase alcohol or smoking materials for children, young people or young adults they are working with or have worked with.

**4. Working with former care leavers**

It is recognised that care leavers may become employed by the council and may become colleagues with the professionals who have supported them in the past. This is a situation that needs to be carefully managed to protect the confidentiality of the care leaver but also to ensure their employment experience is as it would be for any other employee. The guideless in this document are therefore not intended to apply in a working environment between work colleagues.