

Fostering Service Smoking Policy

This is a guide to outline the smoking policy for Foster Carers as agreed by the Sheffield Fostering Service.

This policy also includes the use of electronic cigarettes.

Introduction

Attitudes to smoking have changed as more information has become available about the impact of smoking and passive smoking on health, and particularly the health of children. Smoking is now banned in all enclosed public spaces (since 01/07/2007) and also in cars if children are passengers (since 01/10/2015). Alongside this, fostering organisations have reviewed their smoking policies, and as part of this, BAAF has produced a Practice Note 'Reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for looked after children and their carers' (Practice note 51). In addition, Fostering Network produced a policy paper (May 2007) entitled 'Foster carers and smoking'. Both documents reflect the change in scientific information and improved understanding about the effects on health of exposure to passive or second-hand smoke and both give priority to the best interests of children and their carers and the protection of their health.

The issue of smoking is also addressed within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, which emphasises the importance of health promotion awareness for foster carers in relation to their own health and the health of children placed with them. The rights of substitute carers to smoke must be balanced against the rights of children to remain healthy. This is especially true for children looked after who frequently come into the care system with neglected or impaired health.

Foster carers have a responsibility toward their own health and the health of their families. Where foster carers do smoke they have a duty to consider the benefits of using a smoking cessation support service.

Foster carers have to be mindful that their behaviour provides a role model for the children in their care.

Recruitment/ Assessment of potential foster carers

1. We will not recruit foster carers for children aged under 5 where any person in the household are smokers, regardless of whether the household member smokes inside or outside the house and regardless of the amount that s/he smokes
2. We will not recruit foster carers for the Short Breaks Scheme for children with disabilities, for children of any age where there is a smoker in the applicant's household
3. No children with respiratory problems such as asthma, those with heart disease or glue ear, will be placed in smoking households
4. For new applicants who wish to care for children under the age of 5 or a child with a disability where they have been smokers, but have given up, they should have given up for 12 months prior to going to panel for approval
5. Where applicants agree to look at caring for older children, the assessment will need to ensure that the applicants will only smoke outside the home, and look at how any risks associated with smoking can be minimised

Existing foster carers who smoke and who are currently caring for children aged under 5 or a child with a disability

Approved foster carers should not smoke in the home when caring for a child who is looked after. The issue of the carer's smoking should be discussed with their supervising social worker and also in the foster carer's annual review. It will also need to be included in the family's safe caring policy.

Where a child under 5, or a child with a disability of any age, is in placement in a smoking household, the carer(s) should ensure they follow these guidelines:

- No one to smoke inside the house
- Not to smoke around children or permit others to do so, under any circumstances.
- Never smoke in the car when children are present, even if windows are kept open. This is now a criminal offence.

If a foster carer is smoking outside in the garden, they must ensure that the child inside the home is adequately supervised at all times. For example, it will not be appropriate for a foster carer to leave a young child or a child with a disability unsupervised in the home whilst they are having a cigarette in the garden.

Foster carers may need to re-think when they choose to smoke, i.e. when another person is present to supervise the child or when the child is at school, nursery or on contact.

What happens when the existing placement ends?

In the case of foster placements, once the child's placement has come to an end, no further children under 5 or a child with a disability will be placed in a household where any member of the household smokes, until they have given up.

Where a foster carer has given up smoking they will be asked to sign an agreement to confirm they have given up and they must inform their supervising social worker if this changes at any time. There must be an appropriate time lapse before a child under 5 is placed again.

In the case of permanent foster placements, once the placement ends, and the foster carer wants to continue fostering, no child under 5 years of age will be placed unless everyone in the household has ceased smoking.

Foster carers who smoke and who look after children aged over 5 years

Where foster carers who smoke look after children aged over 5 the issue of smoking should be discussed with the supervising social worker and the carers should be encouraged to stop smoking. As with the carers for the under 5's the issue should also be discussed at the foster carer's annual review and form part of the family's safe caring policy. Indeed, the same guidelines about smoking apply (i.e. they need to smoke outside the home, the need for adequate supervision of children in placement at all times etc).

Children placed under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

Where a child is placed under Regulation 24, with a connected person and they have the status of temporary foster carer then the issue of smoking must be discussed in the same way as with other carers to reduce the risks associated with smoking for any child in placement. There can be additional complex issues where children are living with relatives who are approved as foster carers. Every effort should be made to encourage the carer to give up smoking. However, any risk to the health of the child will need to be weighed against the potential benefit of being placed with family or friends.

Children generally have better outcomes in such placements, and an assessment will need to be made in each case as to the best interests of the child. Ongoing work will be needed to ensure that smoking is restricted as far as possible from communal areas in the home.

Use of electronic cigarettes

Although they fall outside of the scope of smoke free legislation, in respect of foster carers, the Fostering Service views the use of electronic cigarettes in the same way it views smoking for the following reasons;

- We need foster carers to be role models for children in their care and some electronic cigarette models can look like real cigarettes, particularly from a distance, and therefore could give a child in their care an impression that it is acceptable to smoke.
- There is currently no reliable information about what substances and quantities are given off in the vapour from e-cigarettes and therefore no reliable indication of whether or not the vapour poses any risk to health to those around them. However there has been recent suggestion that 'vaping' is linked to developing a condition known as 'popcorn' lung.

Children looked after who smoke

Foster carers may choose not to offer a placement to a young person who smokes, but where the young person in placement is a smoker, foster carers should discourage the young person from smoking and provide them with information about the effects of smoking on their health. Where appropriate smoking cessation programmes should be accessible to children and young people.

Foster carers should never buy cigarettes for a young person and cigarettes should never be used as a reward for good behaviour.

Foster carer's household rules should include expectations about smoking and these should be made clear to the young person at the start of the placement.

Foster carers must never allow young people placed with them to smoke in their bedrooms or in any other part of the house. If they must smoke, they should be encouraged to smoke outside in the garden.

The behaviour of social workers provides a role model for children, they must promote the benefits of not smoking and they should support carers in ensuring young people know the rules regarding smoking.

Social Workers should not smoke around children and young people. They should also be aware that the smell of smoke lingers on the person and in the car and should attempt to minimise this.

Social Workers should never buy cigarettes for children /young people.