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# Introduction

Gloucestershire County Council has a duty to ensure the health of looked after children in their care and must continue to ensure the welfare of the children is paramount. We aim to provide a safe and secure environment for all our children and young people living in fostering placements.

The health risks of smoking are well known and in more recent years we have become increasingly aware of how second hand smoke presents a serious risk to a child’s health It is therefore in the best interest of our children in particular who have already experienced adversity and trauma to be raised in a smoke free home, ideally by non smokers.

This policy should be read alongside giving due consideration to the Coram BAAF practice note 68: Reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for looked after children and their carers (2018) and the joint briefing from Fostering Network and Ash: foster care, adoption and smoking (2016)

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/pn68-reducing-risks-environmental-tobacco-smoke-looked-after-children-and-their-carers>

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/practice-information/fostering-and-smoking>

# County Council smoking Policy for foster carers

* Children under 5 years old should not be placed with foster carers if anyone within the household smokes either indoors or outdoors.
* Children with disabilities who have respiratory problems, eg heart problems, asthma should not be placed with foster carers if anyone within the household smokes.
* In all family, friends and connected persons placements and long term fostering placements the additional health risk to children placed in a smoking household should be carefully considered in relation to the overall benefits of the placement for the child.

It is recognised that there are additional complex issues involved in family, friends and connected persons arrangements and assessments. As with any potential carers who smoke, every effort should be made to encourage family or friends to give up or to create a smoke-free home for the child. However, any risk to the health of a child resulting from such a placement will need to be weighed against the potential benefits to a child of being placed with people who are part of their family (or friends) and with whom they are likely to have a pre-existing bond. Children generally have better outcomes in such placements and an assessment will need to be made in each case as to whether the best interest of an individual child would be better served by living with family and friends carers, even where they may be some doubt as to their ability to provide a smoke-free home for that child.

* Foster carers are advised not to smoke in front of young children and young people. Carers will be expected not to support smoking by looked after children, for example by ensuring that they do not provide cigarettes or tobacco for them and cigarettes should never be used as a reward for good behaviour.
* It is illegal for young people to buy or be sold cigarettes or tobacco. Therefore Foster carers must not under any circumstances purchase or provide cigarettes or tobacco for children and young people in care under the age of 18 years.
* Foster carers should proactively be encouraged and supported to stop smoking.
* Foster carers should actively encourage children and young people who do smoke to seek advice and guidance to help them give up, support to do this can be received from the looked after children nurses and/or discussed at the annual medical. Some useful information and tools are available free on the smokefree website; <https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>
* Foster carers who are unwilling or unable to cease smoking should be offered advice about minimising children’s exposure to tobacco smoke. Carers who do smoke will be expected to create a smoke free home environment.
* Carers should not smoke in the car if children are present. They must also ensure that children and young people are not exposed to excessive smoking when visiting friends and relatives or when other smokers visit the foster home.
* Where foster carers have given up smoking children in the high risk (those under 5 and with respiratory related health conditions) group will not usually be placed with them until they have given up smoking successfully for 12 months.

* For existing foster carers this policy will be discussed by the supervising social worker at home visits and during the household review
* New foster carers will be advised about this smoking policy at recruitment events, and in recruitment information packs. Applicants who are smokers but indicate their wish to be considered for younger children will be assessed but for children over five until they have given up smoking for 12 months. If, after approval carers resume smoking, Gloucestershire County Council will review their approval and the age~~s~~ of children who can be placed with them.
* Foster carers are expected to be honest about their smoking use and if necessary verification will be sought from their GP.
* Foster carers should be provided with or directed to additional information about the risks of smoking in the home.
* Every effort will be made taking in consideration the views of children and families regarding potential foster placements where carers or family household members smoke.

Electronic Cigarettes (Vaping)

E-cigarettes, also known as vaporisers, are not tobacco cigarettes. The use of them has become more wide spread in recent years and can provide a route for smokers to help them reduce or give up smoking. Such products have been developed more recently and due to this the evidence about their long term impact on personal health has yet to be established.

Public Health England reports published in 2015 and updated in 2018 concluded that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful than tobacco, whilst also acknowledging that they are not completely risk-free products (McNeill et al (2015, 2018) cited in Coram BAAF Practice note 68). NICE (National Institute for health and Care Excellence) in 2018 also state that the evidence in this area is still developing. At this time Gloucestershire will not preclude carers from fostering due to their usage of e-cigarettes/vaporisers.

However, the following guidelines should be adhered to:

E-cigarettes/vaporisers cannot be sold to children/young people under 18 years in the UK. Therefore carers must not purchase such items for any young people placed in their care.

* There has been an increase of cases of poisoning of young children associated with ingesting the liquid used. Therefore all equipment relating to the use of e-cigarettes/vaporisers must be kept securely andout of reach of young children.
* If carers, or other members of the household, are using e-cigarettes/vaporisers, they should do so only when children and young people are not present.
* Carers who do vape should not vape inside the home or in the car.
* Fostering Social Workers will be required to discuss any carer’s use of a vape so as to fully consider the potential negative impact and influence this may have on a young person’s perspective about smoking and it’s detrimental impact on health.