

STOKE-ON-TRENT FOSTERING



Smoking & e-Cigarettes:

A Policy for Foster Carers, members of their household, their support network and children.

1.0 Introduction

The Fostering Service and foster carers have a joint responsibility to support children to live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted.

1.1 ***‘Promoting the health of young children and young people in foster care is very important if they are to grow into mature, stable and well balanced adults’.***¹

1.2 It is therefore very important that the impact of smoking (including use of conventional and electronic cigarettes) on the health of children is considered in foster care.

1.3 Throughout this policy, when ‘smoking’ is referred to, it will be used as a covering term for all types of smoking, including electronic cigarettes, unless otherwise specifically stated.

2.0 What the Law says

Smoking has been prohibited by law in virtually all enclosed work and public places throughout the United Kingdom since 2007. From the 1st October 2015 new legislation was also introduced to make it illegal to smoke in private vehicles when carrying someone under 18.

2.1 Since 2007 it has been illegal to smoke if you are under the age of 18 years old. It is also illegal for any person over the age of 18 to buy cigarettes or give cigarettes to persons under the age of 18 years old.

2.2 Possession and use of any other substances via smoking them, including but not limited to Cannabis, is also prohibited by the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971 (and its various updates).

3.0 Our Expectations of Foster Carers and Applicants

Foster carers and applicants must not smoke in their cars when transporting children.

3.1 Although there is some ambiguity regarding whether or not a foster carers’ home falls into the category of ‘work place’ and should therefore be smoke free according to the legislation, Stoke-on-Trent City Council Fostering Service is committed to ensuring that all children should be able to live in smoke free homes (including free from exposure to vapour from electronic cigarettes and similar devices).

3.2 Applicants or Foster Carers who use/smoke Cannabis or other illicit substances will risk their suitability to foster. They may not be approved, or may be deregistered if they are an existing foster carer. This is due the legal implications as well as the serious negative impact on their own health and the potential health of children they wish to be considered to care for/are caring for who could be exposed to the substance and/or its side effects upon the person taking it.

¹ Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services: Chapter 3 (3.49) Achieving healthy outcomes for looked after children

4.0 What if an applicant, Foster Carer or member of the household smokes?

As the city council is committed to children living in smoke-free environments, if a person being assessed, they should be:

- Encouraged and given information regarding the impact of smoking and passive smoking
- Provided with information on how to stop smoking. This may include encouraging them to seek support through their GP or local Pharmacy

- 4.1 Talking about smoking and encouraging someone to give up smoking should form part of the discussion in the fostering assessment process.
- 4.2 Persons applying to foster who smoke will not be permitted to look after children:
- Under 5 years old
 - Who have respiratory problems
 - Who have a disability or health condition that may make them especially susceptible to respiratory problems
- 4.3 The only grounds in which these restrictions might be lifted will be where a person has a pre-existing connection to a child (a connected person carer) and ruling that person out on the grounds of being a smoker alone could result in the child be placed for adoption or unnecessarily separated from their familiar, safe network of family and friends.
- 4.4 In such circumstances, careful consideration would be given as part of the care planning and fostering assessment process and a decision made in consultation with the fostering and children's team managers on the basis of:
- The applicants or carers' commitment to giving up smoking.
 - Their commitment not to smoke in their home or near the child.
 - Their commitment to staying away from the child for at least 20 minutes after smoking, due to smoke staying on clothes/in the air for approximately this length of time².
- 4.5 The expectation of a foster carer who smoked, or any member of their household, would form part of the safer caring policy that the foster carer would sign up to. This would be monitored via unannounced visits.
- 4.6 Where a person is approved to foster, or is already fostering, these issues will be discussed and considered at every subsequent foster care review and should be monitored through the course of supervision.

² Research accessible here: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-311X2016001102001

5.0 What if someone has given up smoking?

Where someone has successfully given up smoking (not just moved from smoking tobacco to electronic cigarettes), a period of at least 12 months will be expected before that person is considered a 'non-smoker' by the fostering service. This is because the risk of relapse during the first 12 months after giving up smoking is particularly high.

5.1 For those applicants or foster carers who have given up less than 12 months ago, the expectations stated above in paragraph 4.4 should be explored in just the same way in the assessment and supervision sessions.

6.0 Children/Young People who Smoke

The city council recognises that some children and young people will smoke or have become addicted to smoking prior to, or outside of their placement with foster carers.

6.1 Foster carers are not permitted to purchase cigarettes for fostered children and young people, or give their own cigarettes to fostered children if they are a smoker, else they could be liable to prosecution.

6.2 Children and young people who smoke should be encouraged not to do so and given helpful information as well as supported to access services that will help them stop. This could be via their GP, local Pharmacy or school/school nurse.

6.3 Where it is known that a child or young person smokes, a discussion and plan should be put together with the foster carer, social workers and child, regarding how, when and if this will be permitted.

6.4 Especially where there are other children placed, smoking will not be permitted in any part of the foster home. It will also be prohibited in vehicles because of the legislation in place that prohibits this. Drivers of vehicles in which children or young people are found to be smoking could find themselves at risk of prosecution.

6.5 If a child or young person insists on smoking, they must be encouraged to do so outside of the property in a safe and appropriate place such as a garden or covered but well ventilated porch area. This must be away from all other children and they must be encouraged to observe the '20 minute' rule as stated in Paragraph 4.4.

Appendix 1

Pt1 What are electronic cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes (also known as e-cigarettes and vaporisers) are battery operated devices shaped like cigarettes that provide a method to intake nicotine. They are a nicotine containing product which does not contain tobacco. The nicotine is delivered orally to the user in the form of vapour rather than in the form of smoke. Hence, electronic cigarettes are much closer to non-tobacco licensed nicotine products such as sprays, patches and gum than to conventional tobacco cigarettes.

Electronic cigarettes are marketed as lifestyle products and are widely available in a range of flavours and packaging. They can be obtained from a range of venues including pharmacies and supermarkets as well as on-line. It is proposed that electronic cigarettes are to be licensed and regulated as an aid to quit smoking from 2016 by Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). For further information about electronic cigarettes, see Action on Smoking and Health Briefing http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_715.pdf.

Pt2 What are the differences between smoking conventional cigarettes and using an electronic cigarette?

The main difference between conventional cigarettes and electronic cigarettes are that:

- Conventional cigarettes contain tobacco and electronic cigarettes do not
- Toxins and carcinogens in tobacco are known to be harmful
- Both types of cigarettes contain nicotine which is an addictive drug

Pt3 Should electronic cigarettes be treated as tobacco cigarettes?

There are some comparisons between electronic cigarettes and tobacco cigarettes that may both confuse and clarify what is a complicated debate around whether they should be treated in the same way.

Some electronic cigarettes mimic the appearance of a tobacco cigarette, and consequently they can model the effect of 'smoking'. However, even when similar in appearance, most electronic cigarettes are easily distinguishable, both in appearance and smell, from tobacco cigarettes. Whilst cigarettes produce 'smoke', electronic cigarettes produce a 'vapour' and the effects of this on the health of both the user and others are currently being researched which is why the fostering service and the City Council has written this policy, remaining cautious and restricting the use of electronic cigarettes for foster carers, children and young people.