**Alcohol, Drugs and Smoking**

**Standards and Regulations**

**Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:**

* [Standard 5 - Promoting Educational Attainment](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_five.html);
* [Standard 6 - Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_six.html).

**Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:**

* [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* [Standard 3 - Understand health and safety and healthcare](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* [Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf).

**See also:**

* [Talk To Frank](http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/alcohol);
* [NHS Choices](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/).
* [Electronic cigarettes – NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/)
* [Drinkaware](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/)
* [Fostering in Bradford - Smoking and E-Cigarettes (Vaping) Policy for Staff and Foster Carers](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/forms.html)

Remember there are many misconceptions about young people in today’s society. They will not all be smoking, drinking or taking drugs, if you have any worries you should speak to the child/young person’s social worker or your Supervising Social Worker. This is really important if you think that a child in your care is regularly drinking or taking drugs, or if a young person has had an excessive amount to drink - i.e. more than you might expect a person of their age to experiment with.

1. **Alcohol**

Foster carers should ensure that young people are educated about alcohol. It is accepted that the more that young people know, the more likely they are to make good decisions about smoking, drinking and the use of drugs. It is good to talk about this subject so that you can give out the right messages and information.

Changing the way that people behave with alcohol and drugs is partly dependent on persuasion so it is really important that channels of communication are kept open. This does not mean that you approve of what the young person might be doing.

Children should never be given alcohol by foster carers. However, there might be special or festive occasions when carers should think about whether this should be mentioned to the child’s social worker in advance and what the child’s parents might think about this. They might for example have a religious or cultural reason that should be considered or alcohol might have been a negative feature of their home life. Any decision to give a child alcohol must be agreed with parent and carers and be clear in the child's care plan

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**What to do if a Child is Drunk**

Where you suspect that a child/young person has had alcohol, depending on how much they think they have drunk, you may need to:

* Offer fluids - water, squash;
* Monitoring and check the child/young person - 10 minutes, 30 minutes, hourly, etc. especially if they go to sleep;
* Contacting health professionals for advice i.e. G.P.;
* Consider hospital treatment.

You should never ignore a child/young person who appears drunk or under the influence of another substance. Make sure that:

* If a young person has drunk alcohol it is recorded;
* You are clear about a young person’s religious or cultural beliefs as they may forbid the use of alcohol;
* The young person is aware of the possible conflict between taking prescribed medication and drinking alcohol;
* You are aware of the amount of alcohol in your home to ensure you know when it is being drunk;
* You understand that young people may have had bad experiences of people getting drunk and so may become anxious if you drink.

**The Legal Position and Alcohol**

Alcohol consumption in the UK is governed by strict laws.

It is against the law:

* To sell alcohol to someone under 18 anywhere;
* For an adult to buy or attempt to buy alcohol on behalf of someone under 18. (Retailers can reserve the right to refuse the sale of alcohol to an adult if they’re accompanied by a child and think the alcohol is being bought for the child);
* For someone under 18 to buy alcohol, attempt to buy alcohol or to be sold alcohol;
* For someone under 18 to drink alcohol in licensed premises, except where the child is 16 or 17 years old and accompanied by an adult. In this case it is legal for them to drink, but not buy, beer, wine and cider with a table meal;
* For an adult to buy alcohol for someone under 18 for consumption on licensed premises, except as above;
* To give children alcohol if they are under five.

It is not illegal:

* For someone over 18 to buy a child over 16 beer, wine or cider if they are eating a table meal together in licensed premises;
* For a child aged 5 to 16 to drink alcohol at home or on other private premises.

1. **Drugs and Substance Misuse**

Foster carers do not need to know everything about drugs and substances to be able to offer advice and guidance to young people that they are caring for.

All young people can be tempted to experiment with drugs, no matter where they come from or their background. Some children and young people will be in foster care because of substance misuse in their family and this may inform how they feel about drugs and their knowledge.

Substances are any substances, whether restricted or prohibited, which may have a harmful effect upon a child, such as:

Aerosols, Gas, Glue, Magic Mushrooms (Amanita), Petrol, Solvents and Amphetamines, Barbiturates, Cannabis, Cocaine, Hallucinogens, Nitrous Oxide (NOS) Hashish and Heroin. This can also include alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco.

It also includes psychoactive substances which can cause a very similar range of problems to the drugs which they mimic, including a risk of dependence developing with repeated use. Some appear to be more dangerous even than the traditional drugs they mimic.

See also:

[Frank - New Psychoactive Substances](http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/new-psychoactive-substances)

[Frank - Drugs A-Z](http://www.talktofrank.com/drugs-a-z)

It is often difficult to tell if a young person is using drugs, particularly when a child / young person first takes drugs or only takes them occasionally.

Some possible indications of drug abuse are:

* Sudden changes of mood;
* Irritability;
* Loss of appetite;
* Increased appetite - possible want sweet things more;
* Drowsiness or sleepiness;
* Evidence of telling lies;
* Unexplained loss of money or belongings;
* Unusual smells, stains or marks on the body, clothes or around the house.

Many of these signs are easily confused with normal growing up. It is vital that you do not make it a taboo subject, but perhaps use opportunities such as stories in the media and on TV to start conversations.

It is important not to jump to the wrong conclusion, but speak to the child’s social worker or your Supervising Social Worker if you are concerned. Further specialist training is available on drug and alcohol misuse and there are people who specialise in working with young people on these issues. Access to these services should be done in conjunction with the child’s social worker. You could be held responsible for any illegal drugs that are kept in your home so having clear boundaries about drug use is important.

Young people often have access to a range of domestic products that are harmful and potentially fatal to them when inhaled. You need to be vigilant with young people around aerosol products, nail varnish, corrective fluid, glues etc.

Training is also provided by the fostering service; speak to your Supervising Social Worker.

1. **Smoking (including e-cigarettes)**

Not all young people will smoke and some may have a period of just trying it but they can quite quickly become hooked on cigarettes. This guidance applies to the use of tobacco as well as e-cigarettes.

Some children/young people placed with you may already have a smoking habit. You should support and encourage young people to reduce or stop smoking. You can get support from the Children in Care’s Nurse or the young person’s GP.

Remember:

* It is against the law for retailers to sell cigarettes/cigarette papers, tobacco, electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) or e-liquids to someone under 18;
* Rules about when, where and by who is allowed to smoke should be clear;
* To be a positive role model to children/young people;
* To raise awareness of the effects of smoking and tobacco use and how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Your role is to:

* Consider your own health, your family and fostered children. If you are offered smoking cessation support, you have a duty to consider taking up the service;
* Be mindful that your behaviour provides a role model for the children in your care and consider the effect of smoking on children;
* Never buy cigarettes or materials used for smoking for children/young people in your care and cigarettes must never be used as a reward for good behaviour;
* Put in place household rules about smoking, making these clear to young people (appropriate age) placed with you;
* It is illegal to smoke in your car when carrying someone who is under 18. (See [Gov.UK Smoking in vehicles](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smoking-in-vehicles#history)). This applies when people have the windows down or the sunroof open, or are sitting in the open doorway of a car;
* The rules don’t apply to e-cigarettes (vaping) or in a convertible car with the roof completely down, however as the effects of this are unknown, the fostering service views this in the same way as smoking and would recommend you do not do this with children present.