

SMOKING AND E-CIGARETTES (VAPING) POLICY FOR STAFF AND FOSTER CARERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Worcestershire Fostering has a duty to ensure the health of looked after children and their foster carers and in doing so must keep the welfare of the child as its paramount consideration. It recognises the serious potential health risks for children living in smoking households including the risks of second-hand or passive smoking.

It is therefore in the interest of children, and particularly vulnerable children to be raised in a smoke free home, ideally by non-smoking carers.

This policy is based on the Coram\BAAF practice Note 68 – reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for looked after children and their carers which can be found on the Worcestershire Fostering's website.

The policy will be used when recruiting, assessing and approving prospective foster carers and when placing children with foster carers.

2. PLACING WITH MAINSTREAM FOSTER CARERS

Children who are considered to be in the high risk group will not be placed with mainstream carers these are

- Children under 5
- Children of any age with disabilities who have respiratory problems, e.g. asthma, heart problems or glue ear.

In addition when considering a long term placement the additional health risks to a child being in a smoking household will be balanced against the potential benefits of the placement. This is because risk levels rise the longer a child is exposed to passive smoking.

When considering placing a child with a mainstream foster carer any view of the child and their family on placing them child in a smoking household will, be taken into consideration.

3. FAMILY AND FRIENDS PLACEMENTS

The additional health risks to the child of being placed in a smoking household need to be carefully balanced against the benefits of the placement for the child. It is recognised that there are additional complex issues involved in family and friends assessments and approvals. As with any potential foster 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 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 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.

4. EXPECTATIONS OF ALL FOSTER CARERS - MAINSTREAM AND FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- Foster carers are advised not to smoke in front of young children and young people.
- Foster Carers will be expected not to advocate smoking by looked after children, for example by ensuring that they do not provide cigarettes or tobacco for them and cigarettes should not be used as a reward for good behaviour.
- Foster carers should actively encourage children and young people who do smoke to seek advice and guidance to help them give up.
- Foster carers who are unwilling or unable to cease smoking should put in strategies to minimise children's exposure to tobacco smoke. They will be expected to create a smoke free home.
- Foster carers should not smoke in the car if children are present.
- Foster carers should also ensure that children and young people are not exposed to excessive smoking when visiting friends and relatives of the foster carers or when other smokers visit the foster home.

5. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF FOSTER CARERS.

Worcestershire Fostering's smoking policy will be discussed with prospective foster carers as early as possible. This will include at recruitment events, in the recruitment information packs and during the initial enquires. Prospective foster carers who are smokers but indicate their wish to be considered for younger children will be expected to cease smoking permanently for at least 6 months before any assessment commences and to have given up smoking for twelve months before children are placed.

For prospective foster carers who smoke and are considering offering placements for children not in the high risk group the assessing social worker will discuss with them their strategies for minimising children's exposure to tobacco smoke and how they will create a smoke free home.

6. APPROVED FOSTER CARERS WHO COMMENCE\RECOMMENCE SMOKING.

If, after approval foster carers recommence smoking Worcestershire Fostering will reconsider the range and ages of children who can then be placed with them.

7. APPROVED FOSTER CARERS WHO CEASE SMOKING

Where foster carers have given up smoking children in the high risk group will not usually be placed with them until they have given up smoking successfully for 12 months.

8. EXPECTATIONS OF STAFF

- Social workers should be aware of the dangers of smoking and ensure that the foster carers they assess or supervise are also aware of the health risks to children. Promoting a positive health message is crucial.
- Social Workers should support foster carers to give up smoking by signposting them to organisations which can help them
- Social Workers should actively discourage any child they have contact with from smoking.
- Social Workers and other staff should not smoke in the presence of children who they are working with.

9. 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 use in terms of effects of health continues to evolve. Public Health England reports published in 2015 and updated in 2018 concluded that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful than tobacco, whilst acknowledging that they are not completely risk-free products. This is also stated by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) in 2018 who add that the evidence in this area is still developing including evidence on the long-term health impact.

At this time Worcestershire Fostering does not preclude approving foster carers or placing children in the high risk group due to their usage of e-cigarettes

However, the following guidelines should be adhered to.

- E-cigarettes/vaporisers cannot be sold to children under 18 years in the UK. Foster carers should not purchase such items for young people under 18.
- Equipment used for e-cigarettes/vaporisers must be kept safely and out of reach of young children. There has been an increase of cases of poisoning of young children associated with ingesting the liquid used
- If foster carers, or other members of the household, are using e-cigarettes/vaporisers, they should do so only when children (of all ages) are not present.

