

# **Alcohol, Drugs and Smoking**

## **STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS**

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- [Regulation 15 - Health of children placed with foster parents.](#)

Fostering Service National Minimum Standards:

- [Standard 5 - Promoting Educational Attainment.](#)
- [Standard 6 - Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing.](#)

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

- [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.](#)
- [Standard 3 - Understand health and safety and healthcare.](#)
- [Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.](#)

## **RELATED GUIDANCE**

- [Talk to Frank](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [Electronic cigarettes - NHS](#)
- [Drinkaware](#)

## **Introduction**

Looking after children who are using substances such as drugs and alcohol or are smoking and vaping can be worrying, especially if you have other children living in the household or household members with health problems.

It is also important for you to know how a child can have been impacted upon by witnessing and experiencing adults around them misusing substances.

BfFC's IFA will offer you specific training and guidance around this topic and complete a risk assessment when you are looking after a child who is either at risk or known to misuse substances. The risk assessment will also consider that some young people may have had negative experiences associated with people getting drunk, which may make them anxious if foster carers consume alcohol even if this is at an appropriate level and time.

## **Alcohol**

Research indicates that open and honest discussions about alcohol, drugs and smoking within families can positively influence young people's decision-making. Foster carers play a vital role in creating an environment of open dialogue on these topics, using positive articles from social media, news, and papers as starting points for healthy and engaging debates.

Changing behaviours related to alcohol and drugs requires effective persuasion and can be a long journey with ups and downs. This is why it is crucial to maintain open channels of communication. Foster carers should encourage young people to be open and honest, as fostering is based on building relationships where everyone knows and supports each other. It is important to emphasize that support and help will always be available.

While foster carers must not encourage young people to drink alcohol, it is essential to teach the principle of moderation. Depending on the circumstances and if the child's social worker, the person with parental responsibility and your social worker agree, celebrating sensibly with alcohol may be appropriate as part of a family celebration. However, in the decision-making process, the impact of alcohol use, particularly in relation to cultural and religious norms, as well as the young person's past experiences with alcohol consumption and their medical history must be considered. The child's social worker's manager and the Registered Manager need to be made aware of the above.

### **What to do if a young person has had too much to drink**

If you suspect that a child/young person has consumed alcohol, the following steps may be necessary, depending on the amount they have consumed:

- Offer fluids such as water or squash.
- Monitor and check on the child/young person at regular intervals (e.g., every 10 minutes, 30 minutes, hourly), especially if they go to sleep.
- Contact a health professional for advice, particularly if they are vomiting.
- Consider hospital treatment if deemed necessary.

Under no circumstances should a child/young person who appears drunk or under the influence of substances be ignored. It is important to:

- inform your and the child's social worker and/or EDT and BfFC's IFA's Out of hours support line
  - Record any instances of a young person drinking alcohol.
- Understand the young person's religious or cultural beliefs, as alcohol use may be forbidden.
- Ensure the young person is aware of the potential conflict between alcohol consumption and prescribed medication.

- Be aware of the amount of alcohol present in the home to stay informed about its consumption.

### **The Legal Position and Alcohol**

For more information on the legal position regarding alcohol, please visit the [GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk).

### **Drugs and Substance Misuse**

Drugs and substance misuse are often a big concern for foster carers, especially where they have little to no knowledge about this area. Foster carers do not need to possess extensive knowledge about drugs and substances and will be offered relevant training and guidance. Times are moving fast which makes it even more so important for foster carers to remain up to date with drugs and substances, so please liaise with your social worker to ascertain if BFFC's IFA has a new training available. There is also a range of professionals who specialize in working with young people dealing with these issues. BFFC's IFA and the child's social worker will collaborate with you if you or a child you are looking after might benefit from professional support.

It is important to acknowledge that all young people, regardless of their background, may be tempted to experiment with drugs. Some children and young people may be in foster care due to substance misuse in their family, which can shape their views and knowledge about drugs.

Substances encompass a wide range of harmful substances that can have adverse effects on a child, including legal, restricted, and prohibited substances. This includes aerosols, gas, glue, magic mushrooms, petrol, solvents, amphetamines, barbiturates, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, hashish, heroin, as well as alcohol, cigarettes, and tobacco. Additionally, psychoactive substances can mimic the effects of traditional drugs and pose similar risks of dependence with repeated use. Some of these substances may even be more dangerous than the drugs they imitate.

Recognizing signs of substance abuse can be challenging, particularly when a child/young person is experimenting for the first time or using drugs infrequently. Possible indications of drug abuse include sudden mood changes, irritability, withdrawal from the family, changes in appetite (loss or increased craving for sweet things), drowsiness or sleepiness, unexplained loss of money or belongings, unusual smells, stains, or marks on the body, clothes, or in the environment, and vomiting.

Many of these signs can be confused with normal adolescent development. If you are worried about a young person in your care and are suspecting substance misuse, please talk to your social worker and the child's social worker. It is crucial not to make drugs a taboo subject and instead utilize opportunities, such as social media stories and TV shows, to initiate conversations. Foster carers also need to establish clear boundaries regarding drug

use and be aware that they can be held responsible for any illegal drugs present in their home.

It is also important to remember that some household products can be harmful and potentially fatal when inhaled, such as aerosols, glues, nail varnish, and corrective fluid. Vigilance is necessary to protect young people from these substances. This will also be addressed in BFFC's IFA's general and individual safer care plans and risk assessments.

### **Smoking (including e-cigarettes)**

Not all young people will smoke, but some may already have a smoking habit or experiment with it. Foster carers must support and encourage young people to reduce or quit smoking. Support can be sought from the Children Looked After nurse or the young person's GP.

Important points to remember include:

- It is illegal for retailers to sell cigarettes, tobacco, e-cigarettes, or e-liquids to individuals under 18.

Foster Carers must not supply children and young people in their care with cigarettes, tobacco, e-cigarettes or e-liquids

- Clear rules should be established regarding when, where, and by whom smoking is allowed.
- Foster carers should act as positive role models for children and young people.
- Raise awareness about the effects of smoking and tobacco use and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Foster carers should consider their own health, the health of their family, and the children in their care. If foster carers smoke, they should not do so in front of the child and not in the house. If offered smoking cessation support, foster carers have a responsibility to consider taking advantage of such services. Establishing household rules about smoking and clearly communicating them to young people (as appropriate for their age) is important. Smoking in a car with someone under 18 is prohibited by law. While the same doesn't apply to e-cigarettes (vaping) by law, due to the unknown effects, BFFC's IFA applies the same rules and boundaries to e-cigarettes as it does to cigarettes and tobacco.

Overall, promoting open communication, understanding cultural and individual backgrounds, seeking appropriate support, and encouraging healthy choices are essential when addressing alcohol, drugs, and smoking with young people in foster care.