

# Wirral Fostering Service

## Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents Policy

IT TAKES A BIG **HEART** TO FOSTER



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## **1. Introduction**

Wirral Council will ensure that Foster Carers and children have access to up to date information, guidance and advice on the risks and strategies that may be adopted in relation to alcohol or other harmful drugs and substances.

If children are known to be at risk of misusing alcohol or other drugs, a clear plan for managing and addressing the risk, including reduction strategies must be included in the child's Placement Plan and reflected in the Risk Assessment Plan.

## **2. Purchasing or Obtaining Drugs or Harmful Substances – General**

All reasonable measures must be used to reduce or prevent children from obtaining drugs or substances which may harm them.

If it is known or suspected that children are obtaining products which may harm them, whether off the streets, from dealers or traders of any kind, Foster Carers must notify Wirral Fostering Services immediately. Fostering Services will then consult the child or young person's Social Worker to decide what action should be taken

## **3. Alcohol**

### **3.1 Children and Young People**

Under no circumstances may a child or young person consume alcohol without the approval, in writing, of the Social Worker and then only on special occasions.

In England and Wales, the law regarding the consumption of alcohol by children under the age of 18 years of age in licensed premises is governed by the Licencing Act 2003. Foster Carers should be aware that despite what the law states in relation to 16 and 17 year olds many placing authorities or parents may have different policies and views relating to Children Looked After.

### **Current Legislation in relation to Young People and Alcohol Consumption**

- It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol in licensed premises (Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000);
- It is illegal for anyone else to purchase alcohol in licensed premises on behalf of someone under the age of 18 (Licensing (Young Persons) Act 2000), unless the young person is aged 16 or 17 and is eating a meal on the premises with an adult present;
- It is illegal under the age of 14 to be alone a place licensed purely for the sale of alcohol. It is legal over the age of 14 with the permission of the licensee;
- 16 and 17 year olds can consume alcohol purchased by an adult (beer, cider, and wine) on a licensed premises while eating a meal if an adult is present.;
- It is illegal to give alcohol, unless under medical supervision, to anyone under the age of 5;

## **What to do if you suspect that a child or young person has misused alcohol**

Where it becomes evident or if a Foster Carer suspects that a child or young person has misused alcohol, a range of responses should be considered and implemented, as appropriate depending on the severity and extent of the abuse. These options could consist of:

- Offering the child or young person fluids i.e water, squash or cordial to ensure they remain hydrated;
- Keeping the child or young person awake – one of the greatest risks is asphyxiation from vomiting during sleep when drunk. Ideally they need to start to sober up before letting them 'sleep it off', and encourage side sleeping;
- Regularly checking and monitoring the child or young person to ensure they are not vomiting or in distress, i.e. every 10 minutes, 30 minutes or hourly;
- Contacting Health Professionals for advice i.e. GP/GP out of hours service/111.
- Taking the child or young person to a Hospital, Accident and Emergency Department if the child or young person requires assessing; or if symptoms are getting worse over time. The need for hospitalisation either as a day patient or overnight should be assessed by an appropriately qualified medical professional.
- If the child or young person is too drunk to stand up and you are unable to take them to hospital, put them into the recovery position (on their side) and call an ambulance/999.

Foster Carers should never simply ignore a child or young person who appears drunk or under the influence of another substance and should always seek advice from a Health Professional if they are unsure about the most appropriate course of action.

### **3.2 Foster Carers**

Foster Carers and their visitors should not consume alcohol in the presence of children, except on special occasions and then the amount consumed should be reasonable.

Once children have gone to bed or are visiting their parents, relatives or friends, Foster Carers and visitors may consume alcohol but should always be in a position to provide appropriate care and respond to emergencies. This may mean that one Foster Carer should abstain from consuming alcohol completely.

As a guide, Foster Carers should be mindful of the consequences of drinking alcohol prior to looking after a child or young person. Performance of day to day tasks, concentration and the ability to drive can be affected the day after drinking. The after effects of drinking could also be bad breath shaking excessive thirst, indigestion and headaches. This may be apparent to children or young people and can have a serious effect on the Foster Carer's ability to act in a professional manner or to provide safe and effective care.

Foster Carers need to be aware that many children come from households with parents who drink or abuse substances. They can be very sensitive to alcohol use and may be distressed around or by it.

#### **4. Solvent Abuse**

Foster Carers must ensure that aerosols, gas, glue, petrol and similar substances are only used for the purpose they were designed for and that all reasonable measures are taken to restrict their use by children who are known to misuse such substances. This includes ensuring alternatives to aerosols are provided and that such items as glue or gas canisters are locked away.

#### **5. Controlled and Illicit Drugs and Substances**

For information regarding the safe storage of medication and drugs within the home see [Consent to Medical Treatment in Foster Carer Placements Procedure](#).

Where there is evidence to suggest that a child or young person has begun misusing drugs of any kind, the Foster Carer should inform the Wirral Fostering Service. Wirral Fostering services will inform the child or young persons' Social Worker. The Risk Assessment Plan must be updated by relevant professionals and parents, where appropriate. The Plan must take account of the current risk and the strategies that will be used for reducing the potential for any harm to the child or young person.

If a child or young person is found to be under the influence of drugs within the placement, the Foster Carers should seek advice from a Health Professional regarding whether medical intervention is needed and contact the Wirral Fostering Service for advice and support.

Foster Carers should attempt to remove or confiscate any remaining drugs or substances from the child or young person, preferably with their co-operation.

#### **6. Ensuring Immediate Welfare of all Person's within the Fostering Household**

If the child or young person becomes unconscious, begins to fit or convulse or the Foster Carers have any other concerns about their wellbeing, an ambulance should be called and emergency first aid administered. The emergency services should be informed that drug or solvent misuse is suspected.

If a child or young person is displaying erratic, aggressive or violent behaviour as the result of drug, alcohol or substance misuse, the Foster Carers need to act quickly to ensure the welfare of not just the child or young person but for that of themselves and other household members.

Appropriate strategies should be used to reduce or prevent the behaviour and risk to the child and others. If Foster Carers do not feel confident to manage the situation themselves they should contact the Wirral Fostering Service. If the incident takes place out of office hours the Emergency Duty Team should be contacted, who will consult with the Head of Specialist Services, as appropriate.

If there is serious risk of injury to the child or another person or if an assault or other serious crime has been committed, the Foster Carers should do what is necessary to protect themselves and other household members and contact the Police.

No further actions beyond ensuring the welfare and safety of all involved and attempting to confiscate drugs or harmful substances should be taken without consulting the Wirral Fostering Service.