

# Wirral Fostering Service

## Smoking Policy and Guidance

IT TAKES A BIG **HEART** TO FOSTER



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## 1. Introduction

Wirral Borough Council Fostering Service provides the following policy and guidance for Foster Carers on tobacco smoking and related health issues in relation to the care of Looked after Children and Young People. The service is working towards smoke free fostering environments for its looked after children.

Wirral Borough Council policy and guidance takes into account the best practice guidance from its Agency Medical advisors and other sources including BAAF (British Association of Adoption & Fostering: Practice Note 51, 2007).

The aim is to promote health and wellbeing of children and young people who are Looked After and Accommodated, while at the same time ensuring that as a wide a choice of placement as possible is available to meet the needs of children and young people from 0 – 18 years.

Where children and young people are placed in kinship care placements this policy should also be used as best practice.

## 2. Policy

From the implementation date of this policy, the following conditions apply:

- There is a desire that Fostering applicants for children up to the age of 5 years must be non- smokers. This also applies to other adults in the house.
- The health risks for babies/young children are:
  - 5 X risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy.
  - 17,000 hospital admissions/year due to parental smoking.
  - Bronchitis and pneumonia rates increase.
  - Increased rates of Asthma.
  - Increased rates of Glue Ear.
  - Impact on time missed from school due to ill health.
- Fostering applicants for children and young people of all ages with a disability, specifically related to a respiratory problem such as asthma and all those with heart disease or other medical conditions deemed relevant by the medical advisor, must be non-smokers
- Fostering applicants who have successfully given up smoking will not be approved to foster children up to the age of 5 years until they have given up smoking successfully for a minimum period of 12 months. This is because relapse rates in the first three to six months are high; after six months the risk of relapse is less and after 12 months most people will be permanent non- smokers
- Fostering applications for children up to the age of 5 years or for children with related health problems with existing foster carers who smoke shall only be approved in exceptional circumstances
- Children and young people from non-smoking birth families shall only be placed with foster carers who smoke in exceptional circumstances
- All older children, who are able to express a view, have the right to request a non-smoking fostering family
- Electronic Cigarettes / Vaping: It is the view of the Agency Medical Advisors and the Fostering Service that these devices will be classed in the same manner as conventional cigarettes. (This includes zero-nicotine devices).

### 3. Guidance for Foster Carers who Smoke

It is estimated that around 500 children start smoking in the UK every day. Many children have their first cigarette at home and in one study, 22% said they had first smoked with a parent figure. Children are twice as likely to smoke if their parent or carer does. In contrast, children are significantly less at risk of smoking than their peers if a parent or carer figure disapproves of smoking:

- Don't smoke around children or permit others to do so. Their lungs are particularly susceptible to smoke.
- Keep your home smoke free. Because smoke lingers in the air, children may be exposed even if they are not around when an adult is smoking.
- Smoke only outside the house.
- If you smoke inside, limit smoking to a room where you can open windows for cross ventilation.
- Never smoke in the room where a child sleeps and do not allow anybody else to smoke there.
- Never smoke while you are washing, dressing or playing with your child.
- Never smoke in the car with the windows closed. It is illegal to smoke in the car when children (i.e. anyone under 18) are present. The high concentration of smoke in a small closed space greatly increases the exposure to other passengers. (See also below)

### 4. Guidance for Foster Carers Caring for Young People who Smoke

Foster Carers are encouraged to have house rules which actively discourage smoking. It may be helpful to have a house rule of 'no smoking indoors' or 'only in certain rooms'. This may help in restricting smoking without making it a source of conflict in the household. If house rules on smoking exist then they should apply to everyone, including visitors

- No child / young person under the age of 18 years is legally allowed to buy tobacco products (UK law).
- No child / young person under the age of 18 years is legally allowed to smoke tobacco products (UK law).
- It is illegal to smoke in a vehicle with anyone 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.  
It does not apply to e-cigarettes; a convertible car with the roof completely down, or to a driver who is 17 years old if they are on their own in the car.
- Foster carers caring for a child / young person who smoke under the age of 16 years cannot give permission or condone the action. They must actively encourage a young person to stop and where possible, insist the young person smokes off their property. Foster carers should inform their Fostering Officer and the child / young person's Social Worker if they are unaware.
- In addition:
  - Cigarettes / tobacco must not be bought or offered to children / young people.
  - Cigarettes / tobacco must not be used as a reward or punishment.

Foster carers should always advise and inform a child / young person of the health risks associated with smoking and other consequences of becoming addicted.

Children and young people need support to be healthy and stay healthy. Foster carers therefore need to promote and provide an environment that encourages improvements in the health and well-being of looked after children and young people in their care.

The Fostering Service promotes a smoke free environment for looked after children and supports smoking cessation advice.

Advice on giving up smoking and smoking related issues:

NHS Smoke Free advice line: 0800 022 4332 (NHS advice) - [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)

Wirral - Get smokefree <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-wirral/health-wellbeing/get-smokefree> (*trix please link*)