

Fostering Service Policy - Guidance on Alcohol Consumption

The information contained in this document should be fully discussed with all prospective and approved foster carers.

Foster carers need to understand that alcohol reduces concentration and impairs responses; this may lead to unprofessional conduct. Foster carers have a responsibility to model the sensible use of alcohol to children and young people that they are caring for.

Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol misuse means drinking excessively – this means drinking more than the recommended limits of alcohol consumption.

The recommended limits are 21 units per week for adult men and 14 units per week for adult women. A unit of alcohol is 10ml of pure alcohol, which is about half a pint of "normal" strength lager or a single measure (25ml) of spirits. A small glass (125ml) of wine contains about one and a half units of alcohol. The number of units of alcohol is often recorded on the bottle, if you are in any doubt.

Men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol a day and women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day.

'Regularly' means drinking this amount every day or most days of the week.

It is also recommended that both men and women should have at least two alcohol free days each week. Your health is at risk if you regularly exceed recommended daily limits.

HCC Policy

Foster carers have a responsibility for the children they look after. HCC recommends that while looking after children, carers should have not more than two units of alcohol. Carers always need to be aware that at least one carer has to be alert to the possibility of an emergency with a child.

HCC also recommends that carers should not drink any alcohol if they need to drive CLA anywhere. If an emergency arises and the child needs to be taken somewhere and the carer has had a drink then the carer should find somebody else to drive them or order a taxi.

It is not at all appropriate for children to see their carers drunk due to the negative messages such behaviour is likely to model to the child.

Alcohol and Pregnancy

If you are pregnant or trying to conceive you should avoid alcohol. If you choose to drink you should only have 1 or 2 units once or twice a week and avoid getting drunk.

Getting help

If carers are concerned about theirs or somebody else's drinking a good first step is to contact the GP. They will be able to advise on services and treatments that are available.

The Fostering Service would want to deal sympathetically with carers who feel they may have a drink problem. We would want to offer any advice and support that may be appropriate.

There are a number of charities and support groups across the UK.

For example: Alcoholics Anonymous Helpline 0845 7697555
Alcohol Concern Helpline (Drinkline) 0300 123 1100.

Children and Young People

Foster carers should be aware that children and young people may have experienced trauma and abuse associated with alcohol consumption or have existing patterns of alcohol abuse themselves. It is therefore vital that carers have full background information about each foster child and are sensitive to the child/young person's perceptions of adult drinking patterns and behaviour.

Foster carers have a responsibility to promote the health and well-being of children in their care. Any issues regarding a young person and alcohol should be discussed with their social worker and the carer's supervising social worker. All parties should be clear about what strategies to adopt in managing any particular behaviour relating to alcohol.

Licensing Laws

Age	The law in England, Scotland and Wales
Under 5	It is illegal to give an alcoholic drink to a child under 5 except in certain circumstances (e.g. under medical supervision).
Under 14	A young person under 14 cannot go into the bar of a pub unless the pub has a 'children's certificate'. If it does not have one, the child/young person can only go into parts of licensed premises where alcohol is either sold but not drunk (e.g. an off-licence or a sales point away from the pub), or drunk but not sold (e.g. a garden or family room).
14 or 15	14 and 15-year-olds can go anywhere in a pub, but they cannot drink alcohol.
16 or 17	16 and 17-year-olds can buy (or be bought) beer or cider (and wine in Scotland) as an accompaniment to a meal, but not in a bar (i.e. only in an area specifically set aside for meals).
Under 18	Except for 16 or 17-year-olds having a meal, it is against the law for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol in a pub, off-licence, supermarket or other outlet; or for anyone else to buy alcohol in a pub for someone who is under 18.

By-Laws and Police Action

In the UK some towns and cities have local by-laws banning the drinking of alcohol in public places. The police also have authority to confiscate alcohol from those under 18 who are drinking it in a public place and can arrest anyone who tries to prevent them confiscating what they believe to be alcohol.

The NHS Choices website can offer further information in relation to alcohol consumption.