



SMOKING POLICY FOR FOSTER CARERS

There are no national regulations in relation to foster carers smoking but each fostering service should have clear written guidance on smoking in foster homes and this should be discussed with all prospective and approved carers. Foster carers need to be aware of the guidance and need to be mindful that they are acting as role models to CLA

Hertfordshire's policy takes account of the CIRCULAR LAC (98) 20 which states;

"Following reports in the early 1990's from the Royal College of Physicians and the Chief Medical Officer's Expert Group on Cot Deaths, there was sufficient evidence for the Department to be concerned about the effect of passive smoking where babies and very young children were being placed for adoption with families who smoke".

This guidance is given in the light of changing information and understanding of the effect on the health of children subject to passive smoking. Priority has been given to promoting the health of children and their carers. A recent study by the BMJ suggested that the only way to reduce children's exposure to passive smoking is to maintain a smoke free home. Other measures such as restricting smoking in the vicinity of the child or using fans or open windows to ventilate a room where smoking has taken place are ineffective (Blackburn et al 2003) The other health risks associated with smoking include poisoning and increased risk of fire.

There are additional risks to the child if they are placed long term in a smoking household. Long term exposure to passive smoke poses a significant risk of ill-health that increases with time. It is therefore important to consider this in the long term matching of children.

IT IS THEREFORE AN EXPECTATION THAT ALL FOSTER CARERS FOR HCC WILL NOT ALLOW SMOKING IN THEIR HOME

Hertfordshire County Council recognises the risk to the health of placing children in smoking households. The risk is greatly increased for children under 5, children with a disability, or those already registered with established medical conditions, especially heart and respiratory disease or glue ear.

The paramount issue is to engage carers in discussing the implications of the **BAAF** guidance on smoking (Practice Note 51) offering support, information and advice in order to promote their own health and that of the children placed with them. Within these general guidelines it is also acknowledged that it is important not to disrupt the stable placement that is otherwise meeting the needs of the child.

It is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances where a child is already placed with kinship carers and has established a close relationship where this policy needs to be balanced against the need of the child to remain in the placement. In these circumstances, prospective carers will be strongly encouraged to cease smoking and the agency will offer support and advice to assist in this.

IF THIS SITUATION ARISES THEN THE HEAD OF FOSTERING AND ADOPTION NEEDS TO AGREE THE PLACEMENT AS AN EXEMPTION

Apart from the above exception Hertfordshire County Council will not assess smokers for children under five, children with disabilities or those with established medical conditions especially heart and respiratory disease or glue ear. It is also expected that all carers who smoke will provide a smoke free environment for ALL children and young people ;This means they should smoke outside the home. This will also apply to any visitors to the house

It is also expected that carers will not smoke in any vehicle used to transport children or to allow a child to be carried in a car where someone has been smoking

If a young person who smokes is placed then the expectation is that they will be discouraged from smoking in the home. Foster carers must NEVER buy cigarettes for young people or use cigarettes as a reward. The young person should also be made aware of the house rules on smoking at the start of the placement. It is never acceptable for young people to smoke in their bedrooms. In the UK the legal minimum age that a young person can buy cigarettes, tobacco and cigarette papers is eighteen.

It is expected that foster carers will educate children and young people in relation to the effects of smoking

If any applicant/carer has given up smoking we will only place under fives once they have not smoked for at least six months