

Smoking and E-Cigarettes (Vaping) Policy for Staff and Foster Carers

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1. Introduction

Bradford Children's Social Care and Bradford Fostering Service have a duty to ensure the health of children and young people in care and their foster carers and in doing so must keep the welfare of the child and young person as its paramount consideration. It recognises the serious potential health risks for children living in smoking households including the risks of second-hand or passive smoking.

It is therefore in the interest of children, and particularly vulnerable children, to be raised in a smoke free home, ideally by non-smoking carers.

This policy is based on the CoramBAAF practice Note 68 – reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for children in care and their carers, which can be found on the Bradford Fostering handbook.

The policy will be used when recruiting, assessing and approving prospective foster carers and when placing children with foster carers.

2. Health risks to children associated with passive or second-hand smoking

The health risks for babies/young children and young people with disabilities 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.
- 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.

3. Mainstream and short break foster carers who smoke or vape

Mainstream and short break foster carers who smoke cannot foster children who are considered to be in a high risk group. This also applies to all other adults who live in the household. These groups are:

- Children under 5
- Children of any age with a disability.

In addition to the above, Bradford Children's Social Care will weigh the balance of the additional health risks to a child or young person not in a high risk category with any potential benefits of living in a smoking household. This is because the risks associated with second-hand smoking rise the longer a child is exposed to passive smoking.

Bradford Children's Social Care will consider the views of the child or young person and their family about living in a smoking household.

3. Family and Friends Fostering

Bradford Children's Social Care recognises that there are additional complex issues involved in Family and Friends assessments and approvals. The additional health risks to the child or young person of living in a smoking household need to be carefully balanced against the potential benefits to the child or young person of living with people who are part of the family network and with whom they are likely to have a pre-existing relationship.

As with any potential foster carers who smoke, Bradford Children's Social Care will make every effort to encourage the Family & Friends foster carer to give up smoking or to create a smoke-free home for the child or young person.

Children and young people generally have better outcomes in Family & Friends fostering arrangements and Bradford Children's Social Care will need to assess each case on its own merits as to whether the best interest of an individual child or young person is served by living with Family and Friends' carers, even where there may be some doubt as to their ability to provide a smoke-free home for that child or young person.

4. Expectations of all foster carers – mainstream and family and friends

Foster carers are expected not to smoke or e-vape in front of children and young people.

Foster carers are expected not to advocate smoking or vaping by children or young people in care, for example by not providing cigarettes, tobacco or e-cigarettes for them and cigarettes /e-cigarette/ vape pen products should not be used as a reward for good behaviour.

Foster carers should actively encourage children and young people who do smoke or vape to seek advice and guidance to help them give up.

Foster carers who are unwilling or unable to stop smoking or vaping should plan how to minimise children or young people's exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke/e-vapours. Carers are expected to create a smoke free home.

All foster carers are reminded that it is illegal to smoke in a car (or any other vehicle) with someone under 18 present

Foster carers should also make sure that children and young people are not exposed to excessive passive or second-hand smoking/vaping when visiting friends and relatives or when other smokers visit the foster home.

5. Recruitment and assessment of foster carers

Bradford Fostering's smoking policy and guidance will be discussed with prospective foster carers as early as possible. This will include at recruitment events, in the recruitment information packs, the Family & Friends viability pack and during the initial enquiry process. Prospective foster carers who are smokers / vapers but indicate their wish to be considered for younger children will be expected to stop smoking / vaping permanently for at least 6 months before any assessment commences and to have given up smoking/vaping for twelve months before children are placed.

For prospective foster carers who smoke / vape and are considering offering placements for children not in the high risk group, the assessing social worker will discuss with them their strategies for minimising children's exposure to tobacco smoke/vapours and how they will create a smoke free home.

6. Approved foster carers who start or restart smoking or vaping

If, after approval, foster carers restart smoking or vaping, Bradford Fostering will reconsider the range and ages of children who can then be placed with them.

7. Approved foster carers who stop smoking

Where foster carers have given up smoking, children in the high risk group will not usually be placed with them until the carers can show they have given up smoking successfully for 12 months.

8. Expectations of fostering staff

Social workers should be aware of the dangers of smoking and vaping and ensure that the foster carers they interview, assess or supervise are also aware of the health risks to children. Promoting a positive health message is crucial.

Social workers should support foster carers to give up smoking by signposting them to organisations which can help them.

Social workers should actively discourage any child they have contact with from smoking or vaping.

Social workers and other staff should not smoke or vape in the presence of children they are working with.

9. Electronic Cigarettes (Vaping)

It is the view of the Agency Medical Advisors and Bradford Fostering Service that these devices will be classed in the same manner as conventional cigarettes. (This includes zero-nicotine devices).

At this time, Bradford Fostering will assess and approve foster carers who use e-cigarettes / vape to foster children who are not in a high risk group.

The following guidelines must also be adhered to.

- E-cigarettes/vaporisers cannot be sold to children under 18 years in the UK. Foster carers should not purchase such items for young people under 18.

- Equipment used for e-cigarettes/vaporisers must be kept safely and out of reach of young children. There has been an increase of cases of poisoning of young children associated with ingesting the liquid used
- If foster carers, or other members of the household, are using e-cigarettes/vaporisers, they should do so only when children (of all ages) are not present.