Advice for Foster Carers on Use of Alcohol including TACT’s policy.

1. PURPOSE / INTRODUCTION
   1.1 The use of alcohol is a growing issue within the UK. There is increasing evidence of the damage it causes to health and the results of abuse can have a range of anti social, offending and personal relationship consequences.
   1.2 This policy is designed to give practical advice for staff in advising foster carers on their own use of alcohol within the foster home as well as that relating to young people.

2. SCOPE / LEGAL FRAMEWORK
   2.1 The use of alcohol outside the foster home is regulated by licensing laws that apply to England, Scotland and Wales. This is age specific –
     - 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 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 year olds can go anywhere in a pub, but they cannot drink alcohol.
     - 16 or 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 and 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.
   2.2 In the UK some towns and cities have local by – laws banning the drinking of alcohol in public places. The police also have the authority to confiscate alcohol from those under 18 who are drinking this in a public place and can arrest anyone who tries to prevent them confiscating what they believe to be alcohol.
   2.3 It is an offence under Section 12, Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937 ‘If any person who has attained the age of sixteen years and has the custody, charge, or care of any child or young person under that age, wilfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons, or exposes them, or causes or procures them to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned, or exposed, in a manner likely to cause them unnecessary suffering or injury to health (including injury to or loss of sight, or hearing, or limb, or organ of the body, and any mental derangement), that person shall be guilty of an offence. In England and Wales this is covered by S1 (1) The Children and Young Persons Act 1933. This has been used to prosecute adults who have been ‘drunk in charge’ of a child or young person. This applies both within the home as well as outside it.
   2.4 It is also an offence under the Licensing Act 1902 to be found drunk in charge of a child under the age of 7, either in licensed premises or on ‘the public highway’.

3. POLICY
   3.1 TACT foster carers need to understand and be aware 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 they are caring for.
   3.2 Alcohol misuse means drinking excessively – this means drinking more than the recommended limits of alcohol consumption.
3.3 The recommended units are 21-28 units per week for adult men and 14-21 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 [25mls] of spirits. The number of units of alcohol in the drink is recorded on the bottle or can.

3.4 ‘Regularly’ means drinking this amount every day or most days of the week.

3.5 It is also recommended that both men and women should have at least two alcohol free days each week. Individual health is at risk if the recommended daily limits are regularly exceeded.

4. PROCEDURE

4.1 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 the placed child and are sensitive to the child/young person’s perceptions of adult drinking patterns and behaviour. These should be shared by the TACT social worker as part of the matching process and discussed in the placement planning meeting.

4.2 Foster carers have a responsibility to promote the health and well being of children in their care. Any issues relating to a young person and alcohol misuse should be discussed with the TACT supervising social worker and local authority social worker. All parties should be clear about what strategies to adopt in managing any particular behaviour relating to alcohol. A ‘behaviour management meeting’ should be considered where appropriate.

4.3 Foster carers have a responsibility towards children they look after and need to consider their use of alcohol when caring for a fostered child. Foster carers always need to be aware that at least one carer has to be alert to the possibility of an emergency to a child and to be able to respond accordingly.

4.4 TACT recommends that carer should not drink any alcohol if they need to drive a placed child anywhere. If an emergency arises and the child needs to be taken somewhere and the carer has had alcohol to drink than a taxi should be ordered or other alternative transport used.

4.5 It is not appropriate or acceptable for children to see their foster carers under the influence of alcohol, this may constitute an offence as indicated earlier and may also lead to action to remove the placed child and for the TACT fostering panel to recommend that a foster carers approval to foster to be terminated.

4.6 Young people in placement should not bring alcohol into the foster home and foster carers should store alcohol safely where young children cannot access this.

4.7 Children and young people under the age of 16 should be actively dissuaded from drinking alcohol. Exceptions made be made as part of ‘normal’ family life e.g. a family celebration, meal in the local pub, on holiday etc. The foster carer must always ensure that the young person only has a limited amount to drink and does not become intoxicated. The foster carer must also be sensitive to any views the relevant local authority and birth family members may have about alcohol use and also any religious / cultural considerations relating to alcohol.

4.8 If TACT carers have any concerns or questions about this policy and its implementation within their own home this should be discussed with their supervising social worker.

5. RELEVANT APPENDICES

There are a wide range of resources available on alcohol misuse on the internet. NHS Choices is one relevant site and Fostering Network also provide written guidance which is accessible to TACT carers via their log in.