



Misuse of Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents

Prevention and planning

AFA will ensure that Foster Carers and children are provided with current information, guidance and advice on the risks associated with smoking (including e-cigarettes and vaping), alcohol, drugs, CBD (cannabis oil) and substance misuse.

If children are known to be smoking, misusing alcohol or harmful drugs, or they are considered at serious risk of doing so, the concern should be addressed in the placement plan, giving details of the strategies to be used to reduce or stop misuse.

Those caring for young people, in conjunction with the child's Social Worker, can use any reasonable measures to reduce or prevent children from buying drugs or substances which may harm them, or those they associate with. However, no physical restraint or violence should be used.

If it is known or suspected that children are buying products that can harm them; regardless of where they were purchased but including from young people known to them, then carers must notify AFA at the earliest opportunity. The agency will consult with the child's social worker to decide what action should be taken, by whom and within what timescale.

Purchasing/obtaining drugs or substances

All reasonable measures must be taken to prevent children from obtaining drugs or substances which may harm them. Where it is known or suspected, regardless of the source, carers must notify AFA who will consult the child's Social Worker.

Misuse of Alcohol by Children and Young People

Carers must respond to a child or young person who appears drunk or under the influence of a substance or drug. Carers need to be aware that research shows:

- More than 40% of children who start drinking before the age of 13 will go on to misuse alcohol or become alcoholics at some point in their lives
- 1000 young people are admitted to hospital each year with acute alcohol poisoning
- Alcohol is now causing more deaths than heroin, speed, cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis combined
- Almost one in ten boys and around one in eight girls age 15-16 have unsafe sex after drinking

Children should never consume alcohol without the approval in writing of their Social Worker, and then only for special occasions such as a birthday or Christmas meal.

If a young person is showing indicators of having indulged in alcohol to excess; the response should be based on how much they have had to drink, what they have had to drink, their current condition and the likely outcome of any further intervention. However, the following are vital to ensure the child's health and safety:

- Offer fluids - water, squash, juice (only if the young person is fully conscious)
- Carry out regular checks and continue to rouse the young person to ensure they are not slipping into a coma. Young people can appear to be under the influence of alcohol but may have also taken drugs or inhaled other substances.
- If the young person is not responding, carers should contact health professionals for advice on 111. If there are serious concerns, such as a child becoming unconscious, vomiting or experiencing seizures, 999 should be contacted immediately.

Expectations of Foster Carers

Foster carers and their visitors should not regularly consume alcohol in the presence of children, although what is seen as a 'reasonable' amount can be imbibed on a special occasion, as long as it does not lead to adults or young people becoming disinhibited and behaving in a way that poses a threat to themselves or others. Carers should be aware that, for some children, the use of alcohol by adults can cause anxiety or distress due to their past experiences.

Regardless of the occasion, carers must be mindful that should there be an emergency, someone within the group needs to be sober, alert, and available to respond to an incident. Therefore, there should be a discussion and agreement that a nominated adult will abstain from drinking.

Carers also need to consider that, depending on their alcoholic intake during the previous 24 hours, work performance and their ability to drive can be affected the day after drinking. The physical after-effects can include shaking, excessive thirst, indigestion, headache and, sickness. Symptoms may be apparent to young people and significantly influence their view of the carer's integrity and ability to perform their role in a professional manner.

Statistics from recent research reveals that the purchase of alcohol for children under the age of 18 years occurs more frequent than previously thought:

'Of pupils who obtained alcohol in the last four weeks, 71% were given it by parents or guardians, 49% were given it by friends and 48% took it from home with permission' (Alcohol change UK).

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 a licensed premises unless they have a 'children's certificate'. If not a child/young person can only go into those areas of licensed premises where alcohol is either sold but not drunk (e.g. an off licence or a sales point away from a 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 be bought beer or cider (and wine in Scotland) by an adult as an accompaniment to a meal, but may not drink in a bar (i.e. only in an area specifically set aside for meals). Young people of this age cannot legally drink spirits.
Under 18	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. The only exemption is for 16 or 17-year-old having a meal.

Drugs, Solvents and Substance Misuse

This includes any other psychoactive substances, whether restricted or prohibited, which may have a harmful effect upon a child, such as:

Aerosols, gas, glue, magic mushrooms (amanita), petrol, solvents, and all controlled substances such as amphetamines, barbiturates, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, hashish, and heroin. It also includes alcohol, cigarettes (including e-cigarettes) and tobacco.

The list also includes psychoactive substances, which can cause a similar range of responses to the drugs which they mimic. This includes a risk of dependency developing with repeated use. Some of the psychoactive substances can be even more dangerous than the traditional drugs they mimic.

Possible indicators of drug and substance misuse include:

- Sudden changes of mood
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite
- Increased appetite – including an increased desire for sweet things
- Drowsiness or sleepiness
- Evidence of telling lies
- Unexplained loss of money or belongings
- Unusual smells, stains or marks on the body, clothes or around the house

However, it is important not to jump to the conclusion that a child who is exhibiting these behaviours is misusing drugs or alcohol. If a carer has any concerns they should speak to the child's Social Worker and/or their supervising social worker. Further training on drug and alcohol misuse is available to foster carers who feel they may need specialist advice and guidance about issues relating to the above behaviours.

Making a referral to any services should be done in conjunction with the Child's Social Worker. Carers must also be made aware that they should not use drugs or keep them in the home, and that they may be held responsible for any illegal substances found on the premises.

Young people often have access to a range of domestic products that, if used outside of their purpose, can be harmful and potentially fatal. Foster carers should be vigilant and consider the risks when children/young people can access aerosol products, nail varnish, corrective fluid, glues etc.

Responding in an Emergency

If it is suspected that a child is misusing harmful drugs or substances and there is no strategy in place to reduce or prevent the behaviour, the Placement Manager or Fostering Manager must be notified. They will consult the child's social worker. If there is an immediate significant risk, for example, the child or another person may be injured or a serious crime may have been committed, the carers should take whatever action is necessary to protect the child, themselves or anyone else present:

- If there is a risk of serious harm, injury, or an incident of a seriously criminal nature, which carers are unable to manage safely, the police should be contacted on 999
- If solvents are involved, fresh air should be circulated freely and naked lights (such as candles) should be extinguished
- If anyone is unconscious, having a seizure or seriously ill, emergency first aid should be given and an ambulance called. Emergency services should be informed that the young person requiring help may have misused drugs or solvents

- Any drugs or substances should be removed or confiscated, preferably with the co-operation of the child(ren) present.

No further action, other than making the situation safe, should be taken without consulting the supervising social worker or fostering manager.

Criminal Exploitation and ‘County Lines’

There is a growing risk for vulnerable children and young people to become exposed to drugs if they become exploited and involved in ‘County Lines’. Please see separate policy for more information.

For further information, see:

www.alcoholeducationtrust.org/parent-area

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

www.alcoholhelp.com/resources

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/smoking-drinking-and-drug-use-among-young-people-in-england/2018>

www.drinkaware.co.uk/underage-drinking

www.talktofrank.com - information on new psychoactive substances, and for a Drugs A-Z

www.childrenscommissioner.uk

Relevant legislation:

Standard 6 - Promoting Health and Wellbeing

National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011

Reg. 15 - Health of children placed with foster parents

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Expectations of Foster Carers Behaviour	Foster Carers, Placement Managers and Senior staff
Foster Carers Handbook	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Safeguarding Children from Gang Activity	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Safeguarding Children from Criminal Exploitation including ‘County Lines’	Foster Carers and Placement Managers

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