



Misuse of Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents

Prevention and Planning

AFA will ensure that Foster Parents 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 or young people 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 within their Care Arrangement (Placement Plan) Meeting, giving details of the strategies to be used to discourage, reduce or stop misuse.

Purchasing/Obtaining Drugs or Substances

All reasonable measures, aside from physical restraint or violence, can be taken to prevent children and young people from obtaining drugs or substances which may harm them. Where it is known or suspected, regardless of the source, Foster Parents 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.

Misuse of Alcohol by Children and Young People

Foster Parents must respond to a child or young person who appears drunk or under the influence of a substance or drug, being aware that research shows:

- In 2018, 14% of 11-year-olds said that they had tried alcohol and 70% of 15-year olds.
- 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 causes more deaths than heroin, speed, cocaine, ecstasy, and cannabis combined.
- Almost one in ten boys and around one in eight girls aged 15-16 have unsafe sex after drinking alcohol.

Children and young people 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 child or 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 their health and safety:

- Offer fluids - water, squash, juice although only if the young person is fully conscious.
- Carry out regular checks, continuing to rouse the young person to ensure they are not slipping into a coma. Be aware that young people who appear to be under the influence of alcohol may have also taken drugs or inhaled other substances.

- If the young person is not responding, Foster Parents should contact 111 for advice. If there are serious concerns, and are worried about Alcohol Poisoning, such as a child becoming unconscious, vomiting or experiencing seizures irregular or slow breathing, pale or blue-tinged skin, 999 should be contacted immediately.
(<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/effects-on-the-body/alcohol-poisoning>)

Expectations of Foster Parents

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

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

Foster Parents 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. Physical aftereffects can include shaking, excessive thirst, indigestion, headache and sickness. Symptoms may be apparent to those in their care and significantly influence their view of the Foster Parent'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 as detailed.

Drugs, Solvents and Substance Misuse

This includes 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, e-cigarettes and tobacco.

Some statistics from a 2021-22 report which considered trends in substance use for young people indicated:

- Cannabis remains the most common substance (87%) young people get treatment for.
- Around half of those in treatment (46%) said they had problems with alcohol, 8% with ecstasy and 8% with cocaine.
- Those young people seeking help for codeine usage is lower than last year, falling by 0.3% (1.2% compared to 0.9% this year). People seeking help for heroin was very similar to last year (0.35% compared to 0.33% this year).
- This year also saw a small decrease in young people reporting a problem with benzodiazepines. However, the proportion (3%) was over 4 times of that in 2013 to 2014 (0.7%).

On 26th May 2016 the Psychoactive Substances Act brought in a blanket ban on the production and supply of “legal highs”, those substances which can cause a similar range of responses to the drugs which they mimic and which in some cases can be even more dangerous than such.

Indicators of drug and substance misuse can include:

- Sudden changes of mood and/or irritability
- Loss of appetite or 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

It is important however not to jump to the conclusion that a child or young person who is exhibiting these behaviours is misusing drugs or alcohol. If a Foster Parent has any concerns, they should speak to the child’s Social Worker and their Fostering Social Worker. Further training on drug and alcohol misuse is available to those who feel they may need specialist advice and guidance.

Making a referral to any services should be done in conjunction with the child or young person’s Social Worker. Foster Parents must not use drugs or keep them in the home and be aware 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 such as aerosol products, nail varnish, corrective fluid, glues etc. that, if used outside of their purpose, can be harmful and potentially fatal. Foster Parents should be vigilant in this regard.

Responding in an Emergency

If it suspected that a child is misusing harmful drugs or substances and there is no strategy in place to reduce or prevent the behaviour, the Fostering Social Worker 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 Foster Parents 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 Foster Parents are unable to manage safely, the Police should be contacted on 999.
- If solvents are involved, fresh air should be circulated freely, and any naked lights 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)/young person present.

No further action, other than making the situation safe, should be taken without consulting the Fostering Social Worker.

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 the relevant policy for more information.

For further information, see:

www.alcoholeducationtrust.org/parent-area

[Alcohol Change UK: Alcohol harms. Time for change. | Alcohol Change UK](#)

[Underage Drinking - Alcohol Help](#)

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

[Know the risks of underage drinking | Drinkaware](#)

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/teenage-drinking>

[www.talktofrank.com](#) - information on new psychoactive substances, and for a Drugs A-Z Homepage | [Children’s Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

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 Parents Behaviour	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers and Senior staff
Foster Parents Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Children from Gang Activity	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Children from Criminal Exploitation including ‘County Lines’	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers

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