

The Fostering Network position statement on smoking and the use of e-cigarettes

The Fostering Network is committed to ensuring that all children and young people in care are able to live healthy lives. This statement lays out our position with regards to foster care, smoking and e-cigarettes.

The joint brief by ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) and the Fostering Network - Foster Care Adoption and Smoking - has been updated (July 2014) and sets out a joint position in relation to foster care, adoption and smoking. It is intended to describe the shared policy position of those organisations working to protect the public's health alongside those working to protect the welfare and interests of fostered and adopted children. It considers the impact of exposing children to smoking and the subsequent impact on their behaviours. The position on smoking of tobacco remains the same: foster carers should not smoke in the presence of children. It also outlines recommendations for local authorities when they review their policy on promoting smoking and smoke free environments.

A new joint briefing paper has also been produced by ASH and the Fostering Network (July 2014) Foster Care, adoption and electronic cigarettes. The use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) is a relatively new development but is a growing phenomenon. These are battery operated devices that provide a nicotine delivery system which does not contain tobacco. The most recent evidence suggests that they are effective in helping people to stop smoking, and that they are unlikely to be taken up by those who are non-smokers.

Electronic cigarettes produce a vapour, but there is no evidence to date that second hand vapour is harmful to human health. E-cigarettes play a role in reducing tobacco smoking levels nationally, and they could be a useful aid to foster carers who may wish to use them to cut down or stop tobacco smoking. The use of e-cigarettes imitates smoking behaviour by mimicking the sensation and appearance of smoking a cigarette for the user and for those around them. There are some concerns that this may 'normalise' smoking behaviour, making it more acceptable especially to children and young people.

Whilst current research evidence suggests that the use of electronic cigarettes is effective in helping people to stop using traditional tobacco cigarettes, there is little to suggest that it is encouraging smoking. The Fostering Network considers the current research evidence provides no compelling reasons for restricting the use of e-cigarettes. Therefore foster carers should not be prevented from fostering or applying to foster because of their use of e-cigarettes.

However we advise it is good practice not to use them in front of children and young people until more evidence is gained about the role modelling effect of this on the smoking behaviour of children more generally. We endorse the content of the briefing paper produced by ASH Foster Care, adoption and electronic cigarettes which gives a comprehensive overview of the topic and is an aid to policy development.

As the use of e-cigarettes is a recent development we will be reviewing this position in 12 months time.

The links to both documents can be found here:

Foster care, adoption and electronic cigarettes:

http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_928.pdf

Foster care, adoption and smoking:

http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_927.pdf

In addition a useful background report produced by Public Health England can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/311887/Ecigarettes_report.pdf