**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Drugs and Substance Misuse**

*Please also refer to the Practice Guidance on Smoking and Alcohol.*

* The use of drugs and other potentially damaging substances have a far reaching effect on the user’s personal and working life.
* Anyone can be at risk of developing a dependency on using drugs and other illegal substances and may be overt or covert about this behaviour.
* Children living in residential services are identified as a high risk group who are likely to experiment and use illegal drugs.
* Children may be covert about their drug use, or conversely, be very open with trusted staff and be testing the boundaries of expected behaviours.
* Some children who are referred to WSCC children’s homes may already have some established substance use issues. If so, staff must be able to effectively support them while also safeguarding other children in the home and will carry out an Impact risk assessment at the referral stage to support this process.

**Staff responsibilities**

* As corporate parents to looked after children, staff have a responsibility to be vigilant about the use of drugs in the home, and support children to understand the risks to their health and wellbeing from continued use of drugs.
* A consistent approach of no tolerance to drug use in the home is essential and must be upheld at all times. However, it is also important to ensure children know they can talk openly and honestly about any use of drugs and staff must be receptive to this without condemning the child.
* Cannabis use must be discouraged by staff, this includes not allowing images of cannabis to be on display within the home or on children’s possessions.
* Children’s homes should display information and leaflets around support agencies and the effects of drug use as a preventative measure.
* Staff must remain alert to any changes in behaviour or presentation in children and consider whether they may be developing a dependency on illegal substances.
* Where substance misuse is identified or suspected in children, a trusted staff member should directly approach the child and discuss their use at an appropriate time.
* Intervention will be based around safe withdrawal and cessation and referrals to external agencies are likely to be helpful.
* It is important that staff adopt a non- judgemental approach when speaking with children about their substance use.
* Where a child is suspected or known to be using illegal substances, staff must attend substance use training and ensure they are up to date in their knowledge of local services.
* Staff must discourage family members of children from providing them with money or smoking materials.
* If a key child requires substance use support then this must be discussed within key work sessions. It is the role of the key worker to make arrangements for both in house and external support for their key child.
* Key workers must ensure that cannabis use is identified within risk assessments, and that appropriate support is identified.

**How to identify Substance Misuse**

* Substance misuse may be the cause or the symptom of a variety of problems. All staff should maintain awareness about the following behavioural aspects of their colleagues or children in their care as any of these may indicate a case of substance misuse:
* Absenteeism
* Accidents
* Low performance standards (or a deterioration)
  + Interpersonal difficulties
* Appearance
* Changes in presentation
* Increasing isolation
* Less availability to money
* Staff with suspicions about a colleague or child in their care should pass their concerns to their line manager to be investigated

**Support options**

* There are a range of voluntary support options available to children identified as having substance use difficulties, including in-house specialists, keyworkers and external agencies.
* Keyworkers within the home will work closely with the child’s social worker, CAMHS and any other involved agencies to ensure effective and timely support is in place. Concerns will be addressed in key worker sessions and be a regular item discussed at Young people’s meetings.
* Where external agencies are involved (i.e. ‘CGL’ - Change, Grow, Live) staff will liaise regularly to ensure services are effective and information is accurately held and shared
* CGL is a WSCC drug and alcohol service who are able to provide a range of support to children including bespoke one to one sessions that are confidential and tailored to meet the needs of the individual child.
* A referral can be made to CGL requesting support for individual children. Engagement with CGL is completely voluntary and children must give their consent before the referral can be processed.

**What to do if you suspect cannabis has been brought into the home**

* Staff will inform the child that there is reason to believe they have brought drugs in the home, and that a room check will be conducted. Staff will remind the child of their legal duty of care to inform the police if an drugs are located.
* Staff will then carry out a check of the child’s room, ideally with the child present. Any findings will be logged on the Room check form.
* Children cannot be personally searched. If there are concerns that a child is concealing drugs on their person, the Police should be called to inform them of our concerns.
* If drugs are found, staff will inform the Police.
* The child will be expected to adhere to a written agreement stating that they will not bring drugs or illegal substances into the home. The Registered Manager will also be able to carry out unannounced room checks where there are justifiable suspicions that drugs are present on the premises.
* Where there are repeated and consistent issues of drugs being found in the home or on the child, the Registered Manager reserves the right to issue warnings or give notice on the child’s placement in the home.

**Links to related documents:**

Smoking and Alcohol

CGL contact details

**Reference Points;**

Offending and Anti-Social Behaviour - when to involve the Police

Smoking and Alcohol

Searching children and bedrooms

Staff code of conduct / expectations documents

Links to drug and alcohol services / resources