**Reasons for guidelines on smoking**

Foster carers are responsible for providing a safe and positive environment for children in their care. The overriding priority in foster care (including relative and significant other) must be the best interests of the child.

Foster carers and staff need to be aware of the increasing evidence of the serious effects of second-hand smoke (also known as passive smoking), especially on babies and young children.

Second-hand smoke is the combination of smoke that comes from a cigarette, pipe or cigar and the smoke that is breathed out while smoking.

These guidelines on smoking are consistent with government workplace policy and the Western Australian Tobacco Products Control legislation.

When foster carers and staff are informed of the risks and dangers associated with smoking and second-hand smoke, they are more likely to take actions that minimise the harmful effects to the child or young person.

**The Department’s policy on smoking**

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) is committed to a smoke free policy to protect children and young people under the care of the Chief Executive Officer. The purpose of the policy is to not expose children and young people in care to the harmful effects of smoking and environmental tobacco smoke.

Some children find it hard to ask adults not to smoke around them, or are often unable to remove themselves from situations where people are smoking near them. As a carer, you must minimise your foster child’s exposure to second-hand smoke.

The Department’s policy on smoking is as follows:

- Foster carers, their family members and visitors must not smoke around children under 18 years in their care. This includes no smoking inside the home or in confined areas.
- There must not be any smoking in a vehicle (moving or stationary) when any child is present. This also applies to Department and agency carers and staff.
- Foster carers must be aware that assisting a young person to smoke by providing or purchasing cigarettes or tobacco on their behalf is illegal and may result in the foster carer being subject to prosecution.
- Foster carers are encouraged to adopt a smoke-free approach and where possible, try to abstain from smoking to protect the child in their care.

**Assessment of foster carers**

A foster carer who smokes is equally able to care for children as a carer who does not smoke.

As part of the assessment process, the Department officer will discuss with the prospective carer their smoking habits (for example frequency, daily intake, and where they smoke, such as inside the home or car).

When making a decision on placement, the presence of environmental tobacco smoke in the home, the child’s age and medical conditions such as asthma, will also be taken into account.

**Facts**

- Research has shown that being around other people’s tobacco smoke can cause a wide range of serious heart and lung diseases, conditions and sickness.
- Second-hand smoke presents a serious risk to a child’s health, pregnant women and those with asthma, heart disease or respiratory conditions.
- Children and adults who do not smoke tend to experience immediate negative effects from exposure of second-hand smoke such as irritated eyes, nose and throat.
Second-hand smoke contains over 250 chemicals known to be toxic or carcinogenic (cancer causing), including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide.

Children exposed to second-hand smoke are inhaling many of the same cancer causing substances and poisons as smokers1.

Studies undertaken in Australia show that exposure to second-hand smoke has resulted in the deaths of children aged 0-14 years2.

Children who live in homes where people smoke are more likely to take up smoking.

Health effects of second-hand smoke on children

Second-hand smoke is the combination of smoke that comes from a cigarette, pipe or cigar and smoke that is breathed out while smoking.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of second-hand smoke because of their smaller and developing organs.

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.

Children get sick more often with coughs, ear infections, lower respiratory tract infections, and increased breathing problems such as wheezing and asthma3.

Children who already have asthma tend to get more frequent and severe attacks.

Children affected by breathing second-hand smoke tend to have more days off from school.

The long term harm includes more respiratory symptoms, poorer lung function and long term sickness in adulthood.

Littered cigarette butts are also hazardous to children. Young children may pick up the butts and put them in their mouth, with the risk of choking or burning themselves. The harmful chemicals and nicotine in discarded cigarettes can be toxic and even fatal to a small child.

The law on smoking

The negative impact of smoking on health and wellbeing has resulted in changes in the law across all states and territories in Australia.

Under the Western Australian Tobacco Products Control Act 20064, smoking is banned in all enclosed public places to protect people, particularly children, from exposure to second-hand smoke. The law includes:

- No smoking in cars carrying children under 17 years of age5.
- No smoking in all outdoor eating areas (i.e. restaurants, hotels, cafes and food outlets).
- No smoking within 10 metres of children’s playground equipment.
- No smoking between the flags at patrolled beaches.
- No smoking in all indoor areas of pubs, bars and clubs.
- Placing all tobacco products out of sight at point-of-sale.

What you can do as a foster carer

- Set “smoke free rules” for anyone in your home and car including family members, friends and visitors.
- If you or others have to smoke, only smoke outside and away from doors and windows where children may breathe smoke in.
- Be aware that your own smoking may influence the behaviour of the child or young person in your care.
- Young people in your care who smoke, must not smoke inside the home or in other enclosed places including a car.
- Provide information on the risks associated with smoking and addiction to children and young people6.

Young people and tobacco use

A young person in your care who uses tobacco (smokes or chews), must be given information on the effects of smoking to make an informed choice on whether to continue to smoke.

Smoking in a young person can be a form of rebellion or a way to fit in with a particular group of friends, peer pressure or even to lose weight. Others smoke because they believe it is “cool” or to make them feel older.

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1 Australian Council on Smoking and Health – submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee: Inquiry into the Tobacco Control Amendment Bill 2008.
2 Fact Sheet – Smoke free home and car - Make smoking history; Western Australia Cancer Council, Department of Health, Western Australia
3 Fact sheet – Second hand smoke and cancer; National Cancer Institute – US Department of Health and Human Services
4 Tobacco Products Control Regulations 2006 - the tobacco legislation aims at reducing the incidence of illness and deaths caused by the use of tobacco products.
5 Fact Sheet - Smokefree in Vehicles with Children; Department of Health, Western Australia
6 November 2009 - Foster care and smoking – The Fostering Network, UK.
Establish firm rules that exclude smoking and chewing tobacco in your house (or enclosed areas) and explain why, such as:

- smoking is bad for your and everyone’s health;
- smoking is addictive;
- people who smoke smell bad;
- it makes your teeth yellow and brown, and gives you bad breath;
- smoking makes your clothes and hair smell, and is not glamorous; and
- smoking gives you a chronic cough and less energy for sports and other enjoyable activities.

### Prevention tips

To help prevent children and young people from using tobacco, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Discuss it in a way that does not make them fear that they are being judged.
- Keep talking about the dangers of long term tobacco use. Even the youngest child can understand that smoking is bad for the body.
- Ask what young people find appealing or unappealing about smoking. Be a patient listener.
- Encourage activities that prohibit smoking, such as sports.
- Discuss ways to respond to pressure from peers to smoke. Your child may feel confident simply saying "no." But offer alternative responses such as "It will make my clothes and breath smell bad" or "I hate the way it makes me look."
- Encourage young people to mix with peers who do not smoke and to walk away from friends who do not respect their reasons for not smoking.
- Explain how much smoking governs the daily life of people who start doing it. How do they afford the cigarettes? How do they have money to pay for other things they want? How does it affect their friendships?

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**Tip:** Praise the young person’s good choices and talk about the consequences of bad choices. Show that you value their opinions and ideas. Self-confidence is a child’s best protection against peer pressure.

**Further Support**

If you need more information or support, visit the following websites:

- **Quit** - www.quit.org.au
- **Smoking Tobacco** - www.smokingtobacco.org
- **Australian Council on Smoking and Health** - www.acosh.org

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**Disclaimer**

The information contained in this brochure on smoking has been produced as a guide only. It is not intended to be comprehensive and does not take the place of the Tobacco Products Control Act 2006 or associated regulations. Similarly, it is not intended to be, nor should it be relied upon as a substitute for legal advice. The State of Western Australia expressly disclaims liability for any act or omission done in reliance of the information contained in this brochure or for any consequences, whether direct or indirect, of any such act or omission.

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