Guidelines on Smoking – Information Sheet

Reasons for guidelines

Foster, family and significant other carers (carers) are responsible for providing a safe environment for children in their care. The overriding priority for children in the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department of Communities (the Department's) care must be the best interests of the child.

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.

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

When 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 is committed to a smoke free policy to protect children and young people in the CEO's care. The purpose of the policy is to protect children and young people in the CEO's 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 the child in your care's exposure to second-hand smoke.

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.

The Department's policy on smoking is as follows:

- You, your family and visitors to your home must not smoke around children under 18 years of age in your care. This includes no smoking inside the home or car or other confined areas where children are present. This applies to Department and agency carers and staff.
- You must be aware that it is illegal to assist a young person to smoke by providing or purchasing cigarettes or tobacco on their behalf. You could be prosecuted.

Assessment of carers

Being a smoker does not prevent you from being a carer. During the assessment process, your smoking behaviours (e.g. how often and where you smoke) and any possible impact of these on children will be discussed with you.

When making a decision on a care arrangement, 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, arsenic and ammonia.
- Children exposed to second-hand smoke are inhaling many of the same cancer causing substances and poisons as smokers[1].
- Studies undertaken in Australia show that exposure to second-hand smoke has resulted in the deaths of children aged 0-14 years[2].
- Children who live in homes where people smoke are more likely to take up smoking.

Health effects of second-hand smoke

- 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 asthma[3].
- 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.

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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] Factsheet – Smoke Free Home and Car - Making Smoking History; Western Australia Cancer Council
[3] Factsheet – Second-hand Smoke and Cancer; National Cancer Institute – US Department of Health and Human Services

Smoking laws

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 2006*, 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 less than 17 years of age.
- 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 carer

Set "smoke free rules" for anyone in your home and car including family members, friends and visitors.

- If you or others choose 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 people.

Young people and tobacco use

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.

Establish firm rules that exclude smoking and chewing tobacco in your house (or enclosed areas).

To help prevent children and young people from smoking, 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 sport.
- 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?

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

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.