

NIYF Policy on Alcohol use:

Executive Committee minutes of 24th November 2006:

It was noted that the Executive had agreed that all Youth Forum events would be non-alcoholic.

It was noted that there were three major reasons to employ an alcohol policy.

- The Law
- Child Protection Regulations and Duty to Care
- Reputation and credibility of the organisation with the field.

NIYF Exec meeting of 25th July 2013:

Exec voted in favour of a no alcohol policy.

NIYF CP policy:

‘A young Person whose behaviour places them at risk of significant harm - a child whose own behaviours, such as alcohol or illegal drug consumption, whilst placing the child at significant harm, may not necessarily constitute abuse for the purposes of Child Protection guidelines. If the child has achieved sufficient understanding and intelligence to be capable of making up their own mind for the decision to initiate child protection action is a matter for professional judgment.’

NIYF’s Policy on Alcohol use:

Alcohol is not permitted while engaging in NIYF activities.

Staff are permitted to consume alcohol whilst on social gatherings and only once any programme of work is finished and programme participants have vacated.

Guidelines associated with this policy:

Let a drunk or drug-affected young person come into your session / NIYF premises?

The question of how to respond to intoxicated young people at your sessions - turn them away, or let them in for their own safety - is complex.

You have to weigh up several factors about your programme, your staffing, the young person's current situation and the alternatives currently available to the young person. There is no single correct answer, from the point of view of law, duty or care, ethics or professional practice. NIYF would however stipulate that young people who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs should not be permitted to participate in NIYF sessions.

Only if the young person's exclusion from the premises places them in danger should consideration be given to allowing the young person to enter the premises.

The guidelines that NIYF offer to assist with staff assessing and dealing with the situation are as follows:

- Is the young person at risk if they are denied access – if so staff must assess the risk vs. the risks of allowing a young person entry.
- If entry is gained the young person should be placed in a safe space away from other young people until such times as they can be taken off the premises / sent home (e.g. in a taxi).
- Staff must take steps to minimise risk to themselves; other staff; service users; etc.
- Child protection policy and guidelines should be adhered to at all times.

Send home policy

Cross reference to above points; NIYF staff should, when planning sessions, residentials, outings etc, put in place plans to minimise risk and allow for crisis management e.g. having appropriate numbers of staff; carry out risk assessments etc.

NIYF's policy is clear on this issue – young people who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs are not permitted to participate in sessions (as above). Their personal safety should be considered and where possible they should be sent / brought home depending on their age etc.

Search & confiscate

The question of whether to confiscate alcohol or other drugs is also more complicated than it might seem as the law states that we can not do this but we also have a duty to care. One would recommend establishing an amnesty at the beginning of any residential and agree consequences for drug / alcohol use.

Ethics and guidelines in Youth Work:

Having a drink with a young person?

Ethically and professionally this raises several concerns:

1. It would usually be a breach of professional boundaries. For instances outside of work - you should not have contact outside of work with a young person from your work. Any exceptions should be approved by management. (See guidance on boundaries attached).
2. Given that many young people drink at unsafe levels, it may not be appropriate for either the young person or the youth worker to drink while with the other person.

If the young person is under 18, purchasing or supplying alcohol for them in most (not all) situations is illegal. Therefore it raises an additional ethical/ professional issue of the youth worker being seen to condone an offence.

If the youth worker actually bought alcohol for the under 18 year old, the worker would be committing an offence in most (not all) situations.

If the young person is over 18 there is no legal issue, but the ethical issues still exist.

Boundaries:

Is it OK... to have contact with a young person outside of work?

Your youth work activities and your private life should normally be quite separate, eg:

- Youth workers should not socialise with young people from their work;
- Youth workers should not have romantic or sexual relations with young people from their work;
- Young people should not visit or contact youth workers at their home (an exception: on-call - see below);

This is part of the well-accepted ethical principle of maintaining professional boundaries.

Blurred professional boundaries

This professional boundary, and therefore ethical conduct, is less clear cut in some situations.

You have private connections to young people. Eg:

- You live and work in the same area;
- You both belong to the same close ethnic community;
- You are related to a young person who uses the agency;

- The young person is a relative of a close friend.

It is not clear whether you are a "youth worker" or not. So it is not clear what, if any, ethical principles, agency policies or codes of conduct apply to you. Eg:

- You are being paid for a few hours work eg. as a casual worker, or to help organise an event or project, (whether you are a young person or not);
- You are an admin worker or some other "non-youth worker" (young person or not);
- You are a volunteer (young person or not); you are a young person who is a peer leader or peer researcher or involved in some other form of youth participation.

It is not clear if the young person should be thought of as a "client" or not. Eg:

- They are an ex-client;
- They are a client of another project in your multi-project agency;
- Their connection with your agency and your work is weak. (e.g. their only connection with the agency is that they attended an event you ran for a hundred young people).

Is it OK to have contact with a young person from the agency in one of these situations?

It is not fair or realistic to impose the same ethical rules in every one of these situations above. At the same time, it is potentially risky, for young people, youth workers and agencies, to leave these situations completely unregulated. In some cases the problem can be easily solved by devising an appropriate policy or code of conduct, eg. for volunteers or admin workers.

If you have had contact, or might have contact, with a young person outside of work in any of these situations of blurred professional boundaries, and your existing agreements and policies do not adequately protect young people, yourself and the agency, then you and your line manager should discuss and if appropriate consider drawing up a specific agreement outlining how you will manage the situation. This agreement would make it clear what is acceptable and what is not, to protect everyone involved.

If the situation doesn't justify drawing up an agreement, it may be enough to simply report the situation to your manager, who should make a written record that they are aware of, and comfortable with, the situation.