A FOSTER PARENT GUIDE:
Foster Care
Rate Assessment

THE WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN YOUTH & FAMILIES
CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS | JANUARY 2020
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What is the foster care rate assessment?

You will receive a foster care maintenance reimbursement to help you meet the needs of every child or youth who comes into your home through the foster care system.

Once a child or youth is placed in your foster home, a Foster Care Rate Assessor will contact you. You will need to answer questions about the amount of time you spend meeting the child or youth’s needs. The answers will be given a corresponding numerical value based on the hours per week spent on caring for the child or youth.

The numerical values will be entered into FamLink, a Department of Children, Youth & Families management information system that calculates reimbursement rates. The resulting foster care rate assessment will cover six months.

Following the assessment, you will receive a notification letter explaining the level of the assessment and how you can appeal if you disagree with the amount you are to be reimbursed.

What factors go into a rate assessment?

The rate assessment addresses the needs of the child or youth and the foster parent’s ability to meet those needs.

The Foster Care Rate Reimbursement has four levels. These levels are based on the age of the child or youth; the behavioral, emotional, physical and mental health needs of the child or youth; and the foster parents’ ability to meet those needs.

Within those levels are three different age categories: 0 to 5; 6 to 11; and 12 and older. The older the child or youth, the higher the reimbursement rate, regardless of the factors listed above.

- Level 1 is the basic amount of care provided to any child or youth based on the child or youth's age, still recognizing each child or youth has individual needs.
- Levels 2, 3 and 4 represent increased levels of non-routine caregiving provided by the foster parent.

“Non-routine caregiving” means the foster parents’ extra time and effort beyond typical care needed to meet a child or youth’s additional needs. The definition is not directly based on a child or youth’s diagnosis or condition, although that diagnosis or condition could create extra demands on the foster parent that can be reimbursed.

When is a foster care rate assessment done?

Rate assessments are done:

- Within 30 days of the first day of placement.
- Within 30 days after a child or youth moves to another foster home.
- At least every six months when the reimbursement authorization is due or needs to be renewed.
- When a substantial change occurs in the child or youth’s circumstances or in your ability to meet the child or youth’s needs. You, as the foster parent, or the child or youth’s assigned caseworker may request an assessment be completed by the foster care rate assessor.

In all cases, the rate assessor will contact you by phone or letter to set up an appointment to complete the rate assessment.
How It Works

1. The rate assessor will call you to make an appointment to complete the assessment within 30 days of the date the child or youth first came into your home. You may request a copy of the assessment form prior to the meeting to use to estimate the average number of hours you will spend, over the next six months, for each activity on the form, over and above the typical needs of a child or youth of the same age.

Because you likely do not know the child or youth well, you may be unsure about the time that will be required to care for the child or youth. If the rate assessor believes you may have underestimated or overestimated the time required, a reassessment can occur after three months. You may be asked to keep track of the time you are spending attending to the child or youth's needs. You are not required to do this, but we highly recommend it.

2. The rate assessor will discuss the child or youth's needs for services. The rate assessor may be aware of additional community supports or public assistance available to the child or youth. In addition, the assigned caseworker, with supervisory approval, may authorize additional services using other payment sources.

3. You will receive a letter notifying you of the rate you will be reimbursed. In addition, the rate assessor may phone you with this information. The letter also will let you know how to appeal if you are not in agreement with the reimbursement rate.

How to Assess Available Hours

The rate assessor may ask you the following questions to help break down the available hours you have to spend to care for, support and supervise the child:

- How many other foster children or youth are there in the home?
- How many hours a week do you spend working outside the home?
- What time does the child or youth get up in the morning?
- What is the child or youth's bedtime?
- If the child or youth attends school, what hours are they in school?
- If the child receives childcare, what hours is the child receiving childcare?
- How many days a week does the child or youth participate in after-school activities? How many hours?
- How many hours does the child or youth receive other services, such as respite or Medicaid Personal Care?
- Other questions that will lead to a more complete picture of the child or youth's needs.

In addition, the rate assessor may ask the child or youth, if age appropriate, about their daily routine. The rate assessor will also gather information from the child or youth's case file, FamLink or caseworker during the assessment process.

The chart below displays the hours spent meeting the needs of a typically developing child or youth. The rate assessor will subtract these hours from the amount of time actually spent, if that amount actually spent is greater. The difference will be used to calculate the level of reimbursement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child's Age</th>
<th>0-3 yrs</th>
<th>3-5 yrs</th>
<th>6-10 yrs</th>
<th>11-15 yrs</th>
<th>15-18 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2 hrs/wk</td>
<td>4 hrs/wk</td>
<td>4 hrs/wk</td>
<td>5 hrs/wk</td>
<td>2 hrs/wk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1 hr/week</td>
<td>2 hr/week</td>
<td>3 hr/week</td>
<td>3 hr/week</td>
<td>1 hr/week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Advocacy means helping a child or youth access services and support.
Levels of Care

Level 1
Foster parents can meet the needs of the children or youth within the timeframes of a typically developing child or youth.

Level 2
Children or youth assessed at Level 2 most often have issues requiring more time and attention than those at Level 1, such as specific behavioral and emotional issues or intellectual challenges.

Levels 3 and 4
Children or youth assessed at Levels 3 and 4 comprise less than 5% of children or youth in foster care. These children or youth require a lot more time from the foster parent because of behavioral issues needing intervention, severe mental health disorders, ongoing alcohol or other drug involvement, behaviors that require a safety plan or behaviors that have resulted in a child or youth being unable to stay in one home for very long, among other factors.

Level 3 and 4 children or youth often participate in more than one treatment program and/or in treatment in your home, which could have an effect on the number of hours providing care.

What if I am licensed through a Tribe or private agency?
If you are licensed through a Tribe or private agency, the same rules apply to you that apply to state-licensed foster parents. The rate assessor will complete your assessment over the phone and will work with the tribal or private agency case manager as needed.
**Requesting a review of the rate assessment**

Can a foster parent request a review of the rate assessment?

Foster parents, acting on behalf of the foster child or youth, may request a review of the rate assessment if they believe it is incorrect.

**How does it work?**

1. The foster parent must make a written request for a review of the assessment.
2. The request must be sent to the individual at the address identified in the foster care rate notification letter.
3. The request must be received within 20 calendar days of the date of the notification letter. If the request is not made within 20 days, the assessment will not be reviewed, with some exceptions. An extension may be granted:
   - If the foster parent has contacted a regional foster parent liaison within the initial 20 day time period and asked for assistance to informally resolve any disagreement as to the rate assessed.
   - If the Department believes good cause exists for an extension.
4. The request must include a statement explaining why the foster parent believes the assessed rate is incorrect. The foster parent may provide additional information that they believe is relevant to the questions asked on the rate assessment form.

**What happens during the review?**

1. A staff member not involved in the original rate assessment process, either a management level staff member or someone designated by that staff member, will conduct the review.
2. The review will be conducted within 10 calendar days of receiving the request for review.
3. The reviewer will consider:
   - whether the foster parent and the rate assessor met in person or by telephone to jointly complete the rate assessment form;
   - whether the information obtained through the conversation between the rate assessor and the foster parent was accurately recorded on the rate assessment form;
   - the statement from the foster parent explaining why they believe the assessment to be incorrect and whether that information is relevant to the automated assessment and;
   - whether the information was accurately entered into and processed by FamLink.
4. The Department will not consider information about the child or youth or the foster family that is outside the rate assessment form and will not alter a FamLink calculation that is based on a properly completed form.
How does the foster parent learn about the decision on the appeal?

1. The Department will send the foster parent a written letter stating it:
   (a) upheld the rate assessment level; or
   (b) agrees the rate was incorrectly calculated and will adjust the rate to the accurate level.

2. If the Department upholds the rate assessment, the notice will provide information about further review.

How does the foster parent appeal the Department’s decision on review?

1. If the Department upholds the rate assessment level on review, the foster parent has the right to request a further review of the assessment by timely requesting an administrative hearing.

2. The request must be in writing and sent to the Office of Administrative Hearings
   2420 Bristol Ct. S.W., First Floor
   P.O. Box 42488
   Olympia WA 98504-2488

3. The request must be received by the Office within 20 days from the date of the letter notifying the foster parent of the Department’s decision on the review.

4. Foster care providers and recipients of foster care funds can request an administrative hearing review of the specific rate for a specific child or youth but do not have the legal right to request an administrative hearing to challenge or dispute the established rates/levels of the foster care program or to challenge the foster care rate assessment form, questions or program.

What issues may be decided by the Administrative Law Judge?

1. The Administrative Law Judge will only consider information that was considered by the Department’s review:
   (a) whether the foster parent and the rate assessor met in person or by telephone to jointly complete the rate assessment form;
   (b) whether the information obtained in the meeting between the rate assessor and foster parent was accurately recorded on the rate assessment form;
   (c) the statement submitted previously from the foster parent explaining why they believe the assessment to be incorrect and whether that information from the previous review was accurately recorded on the form; and
   (d) whether the information was accurately entered into and calculated by FamLink.

2. The Judge must not consider information about the child or the foster family that is outside the rate assessment form or that was not provided to the Department at the time of the rate assessment or at the time of the Department’s review of the rate assessment.

3. The Judge must not make a determination that conflicts with a properly completed foster care rate assessment.

4. The Judge must not consider a challenge to the Department’s established foster care rates or to the foster care rate assessment standardized form or program.
Frequently asked questions

Can I fill out the rate assessment and mail it in?
No. The rate assessment needs to be completed in person or by phone with the rate assessor.

How much time does the average assessment take?
About 45 minutes. The assessment process is your opportunity to provide the rate assessor with information vital to accurately assessing the child or youth’s care, support and supervision needs.

Can a child or youth be assessed at different levels in different homes?
Yes. Since the rate assessment determines a foster parent’s ability to meet a child or youth’s needs, different foster parents may be assessed at different rates.

Do siblings placed in the same foster home require separate assessments?
Yes. Each child or youth needs their own assessment.

Am I required to keep a log of how much time I spend meeting the needs of the child or youth?
No. You may choose to do so, however, for your benefit and for the benefit of other caregivers the child or youth may have in the future.
How will I be notified of the rate of reimbursement I will receive?
You will receive a letter notifying you of the rate.

What happens when a child or youth goes on the run?
Under state policy, if you agree in writing to accept the child or youth back in your home before 15 days expires, the reimbursement continues for 15 days. After the child or youth is on the run for 15 days on, the reimbursement is stopped and the placement is closed. If the child or youth returns to your home or a new home after 15 days, a new placement is opened and a new assessment must be done.

What if I encounter temporary difficulty with a child or youth?
The foster care rate may be increased for a selected period of time. Temporary foster care rate increases help support the foster parent’s increased efforts if the child or youth experiences a temporary condition.

What happens when a child or youth is re-assessed due to significant changes in health or behavior?
The rate assessor may do a re-assessment on the child or youth that could increase the level of reimbursement. This rate change can be applied only to current or future care of the child or youth, not to past care.

When can a caseworker provide additional services?
The child or youth may be eligible for additional supports and services, regardless of the rate. Sometimes approval for such services must come from management at the Department in your region. In other situations, the child or youth’s caseworker can assist with referrals to community supports or other public assistance.

Are additional services such as special equipment and/or specialized therapy part of the foster care rate assessment?
No. Additional services are paid for separately from the monthly foster care reimbursement.

What happens with the completed assessment?
A written copy of the assessment is kept in the child or youth’s case file and a history of all assessments authorized for the child or youth is kept in FamLink.

What happens if I disagree with the rate assessed?
You can appeal a rate decision. This can occur at three times: when the rate is denied, when it is reduced, or when it is terminated. One factor to note: when a child or youth improves in your care and the exceptional tasks you have performed no longer are needed, the rate will be reduced.

When does a child or youth’s foster care reimbursement end?
The reimbursement ends when:
1. the child or youth is placed in a different foster home;
2. the child or youth is returned to the biological parent;
3. the child or youth is adopted;
4. the youth turns 18 and is not participating in the Extended Foster Program; or
5. if the youth is participating in the Extended Foster Care program, the reimbursement will end on the youth’s 21st birthday or when they lose eligibility for extended foster care.