

A FOSTER PARENT  
GUIDE TO  
FOSTER CARE RATE  
ASSESSMENT



Children's Administration  
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## A Foster Parent's Practical Guide to the Foster Care Rate Assessment

### **What is the Foster Care Rate Assessment?**

Every child who comes into your home through the foster care system will also come with monthly financial assistance to help you meet the child's needs.

This financial assistance is not a payment in the usual sense. It is a reimbursement for the costs of caring for the child.

As a foster parent, you will discuss with the child's social worker or designated rate assessment specialist the time you are spending and the work you are doing in support of the child. You will answer questions about that time and work you are doing with the child. The answers will be given a numerical value based on the hours per week being spent in caring for the child.

The answers will then be calculated by computer and a reimbursement rate will be determined. This process is called the Foster Care Rate Assessment

Following the assessment, you will then receive a payment plan showing the monthly reimbursement amount for a 6-month period.

### **What Factors Go Into A Rate Assessment?**

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

The Foster Care Rate Assessment is based on: the age of the child; the needs of the child; and your ability to meet those needs.

Based on these factors, a four-level reimbursement system was created. There are three different age categories; 0-5 years old; 6-11 years old; and 12 years and older.

The older the child, the higher the reimbursement rate, regardless of factors listed below.

- Level 1 is basic care. This would be the level based on the routine caretaking based on the child's age.
- Levels 2, 3 and 4 represent increased levels of **non-routine** caretaking provided by the foster parent to maintain the child in care. "Non-routine caretaking" means the foster' parents' extra time and effort spent to meet the child's extraordinary needs. The definition is not directly based on a child'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 at the following times:

- Within 30 days of the first day a child comes into your home.
- Within 30 days following placement when a child moves to another foster home.
- At least every 6 months.
- When there is a *substantial* change in circumstances for the child or in your ability to meet the child's needs.

In all cases, the social worker will contact you at the appropriate time to do the rate assessment.

## **Here's How It Works:**

For the first-time assessment, you can expect:

1. The social worker or designated rate assessment shall call you to make an appointment to complete the assessment. This will be done within 30 days of the date the child first came into your home. The social worker or designated rate assessment will review the assessment questions with you. You may request a copy of the assessment form prior to the meeting.
2. You will be asked to estimate the time you will spend, over and above the time that would be spent to meet the typical needs of a child of this age, over the next 6 months for each of the activities listed on the assessment form.
3. Because the child is likely unknown to you, you may be unsure about the time that will be required in caring for the child. If the social worker or designated rate assessment believes you have underestimated or overestimated the time required, a reassessment can occur in three months. You may be asked to keep track of the time you are spending on the child, although this is not a requirement.
4. The social worker or designated rate assessment shall discuss any other service needs of the child when the assessment is done. Additional services may be authorized using other payment sources.
5. The social worker or designated rate assessment may inform you by phone of the rate calculated through the assessment and will send you a copy of the payment plan that indicates the rate of pay.

**Step To Assess Available Hours:**

The social worker or designated rate assessment may ask you the following questions to help break down the available hours you have to spend to care for the child:

- How many other foster children are there in the home?
- How many hours do you work in your job outside the home?
- What time does the child get up in the morning?
- What is the child’s bedtime?
- If the child attends school, what hours is s/he in school?
- If the child receives childcare, what hours is the child receiving childcare?
- How many days a week does the child participate in after school activities? How many hours?
- How many hours does the child receive other services such as respite or Medicaid Personal Care?
- The social worker may ask the child, if age appropriate, about his or her daily routine.
- The social worker may also ask you other questions to get a more complete picture of the child’s needs.

The chart below displays the hours you may typically spend meeting the needs of a typically developing child. These would be considered routine. The social worker or designated rate assessment will subtract these hours from the amount of time actually spent, if that amount is greater. The difference will be used to help calculate the level of reimbursement.

<u>Children Ages:</u>	<u>0-3</u>	<u>3-5</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>11-15</u>	<u>15-18</u>
Education-	2hrs/wk	4hrs/wk	4hrs/wk	5hrs/wk	2hrs/wk
Advocacy-	1hr/week	2hrs/week	3hrs/week	3hrs/week	1hr/week

\* Advocacy means helping a child access services and support.

## **Levels of Care:**

### **Level 1**

Children assessed at this level can have their needs met by the foster parent within the timeframes of a typically developing child.

### **Level 2**

Children assessed at Level 2 most often have issues requiring more time and attention than those at Level 1. The foster parent will spend time beyond meeting a child's basic needs. Children at this level usually have specific behavioral and emotional issues or have intellectual challenges.

### **Levels 3 and 4**

Children assessed at Levels 3 and 4 consist of less than 5% of children in foster care as they are the children with the highest needs for care. These children require a lot more time from the foster parent because of the intensity or severity of their issues.

Level 3 and 4 children often have greater degrees of the following issues: behavioral issues needing intervention; psychiatric issues; severe mental health disorders; ongoing drug/alcohol involvement; behaviors that require a safety plan; or behaviors that have resulted in a child being unable to stay in one home for very long.

Quite often Level 3 and 4 children will be participating in more than one treatment program, and/or participating in treatment in your home.

### **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 as with foster parents licensed through the state. But either the tribal or private agency social worker will work with you on the assessment and will work with the state social worker or designated rate assessment to complete the paperwork.

## **Requesting a review of the Rate Assessment**

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

If a foster parent, acting on behalf of the foster child, believes the rate assessment is incorrect, he or she may request a review of the rate assessment for the child.

### **How does a foster parent seek a department review of the rate assessment?**

1. The foster parent must make a written request for department review of the assessment.
2. The request must be sent to the individual at the address identified in the letter informing the foster parent of the rate assessed for the child.
3. The request must be received by CA within twenty calendar days of the date of the letter informing the foster parent of the rate assessed for the child. If a request is not made within twenty days, the department will not review the assessment.
4. Exceptions to the 20-day request:
  - (a) The department may grant an extension of time for filing the request for review:
    - If the foster parent has contacted a regional foster parent liaison within the initial twenty-day time period and asked for assistance to informally resolve any disagreement as to the rate assessed; or
    - If the department believes good cause exists for an extension, it has the ability to grant one.
5. 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 he or she believes is relevant to the questions asked on the standardized form.

### **What does the department consider in reviewing the request?**

1. The review will be conducted by a staff member not involved in the rate assessment process, either a management level staff member or someone designated by that staff member.
2. The review will be conducted within ten calendar days of receiving the request for review.
3. The reviewer will consider:
  - (a) Whether the foster parent and the social worker or designated rate assessment specialist met in person or by telephone to jointly complete the standardized assessment form;
  - (b) Whether the information obtained through the conversation between the social worker or rate assessment specialist and the foster parent was accurately recorded on the form;
  - (c) The statement submitted previously from the foster parent explaining why he or she believes the assessment to be incorrect and whether that information is relevant to the automated assessment.

- (d) Whether the information was accurately entered into the computer program; and
  - (e) Whether the computer program was properly functioning in calculating the rate and providing the written report of the assessment.
4. The department will not consider information about the child or the foster family that is outside the standardized assessment form and will not alter the computerized calculation that is based on a properly completed form.

**How does the foster parent learn about the department's decision of a review?**

1. The department will send the foster parent a written letter notifying the foster parent that the department either:
  - (a) Upholds the rate assessment; or
  - (b) Agrees the rate was wrongly calculated and adjusts the rate to the proper 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 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 (OAH).

Office of Administrative Hearings  
2420 Bristol Court SW, 1st Floor  
P.O. Box 42488  
Olympia WA 98504-2488

3. The request must be received by OAH within twenty 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, but do not have the legal right to request an administrative hearing to challenge or dispute the established rates of the foster care program or to challenge the foster care rate assessment standardized form or program.

**What law and rules govern the administrative law judge?**

Please see box below.

**What issues may be decided by the Administrative Law Judge?**

1. The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) will consider only the same factors as were considered on the initial appeal:



- (a) Whether the foster parent and the social worker or designated rate assessment specialist met in person or telephonically to jointly complete the standardized assessment form;
  - (b) Whether the information obtained in the meeting between the social worker or rate assessment specialist and foster parent was accurately recorded on the form;
  - (c) The statement submitted previously from the foster parent explaining why he or she believes the assessment to be incorrect and whether that information from the previous review was accurately recorded on the form, if applicable;
  - (d) Whether the information was accurately entered into the computer program; and
  - (e) Whether the computer program was properly functioning in calculating the rate and providing the written report of the assessment.
2. The ALJ must not consider information about the child or the foster family that is outside the standardized assessment form or that was not provided to the department at the time of the assessment or at the time of the department's review of the assessment.
3. The ALJ must not make a determination that conflicts with a properly completed standardized foster care rate assessment.
4. The ALJ must not consider a challenge to the department's established foster care rates or to the foster care rate assessment standardized form or program.

Chapter 34.05 RCW, chapter 388-02 WAC, and the sections of this chapter relating to foster care rate assessments govern any administrative hearing to review a child's foster care rate assessment.

In the event of a conflict between the provisions of this chapter and chapter 388-02 WAC, the provisions of this chapter prevail.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Will I get a copy of the rate assessment in the mail to fill out?*

**NO**

The rate assessment needs to be done in person or by phone.

*How much time does the average assessment take?*

The form takes an average of 45 minutes to complete.

The assessment process is a good opportunity for you to provide the social worker with information vital to the child's care and for the social worker to discuss plans for any additional services.

*Can a child be assessed at different levels in different homes?*

**YES**

Since the assessment determines a foster parent's ability to meet a child's needs, different foster parents may meet a child's need at different levels.

*Do siblings placed in the same foster home require separate assessments?*

**YES**

Each child needs his or her own assessment.

*Am I required to keep a log of how much time I spend meeting the needs of the child?*

**NO**

You may choose to do so, however, both for your benefit and for the benefit of other caretakers the child may have in the future.

*How will I be notified of the rate the child will receive?*

1. The child's social worker or designated rate assessment may call you after the rate assessment is done and the reimbursement rate is computed.
2. You will receive an authorization notification of the amounts and date authorized.

*What happens when a child goes on the run?*

Under state policy if you agree in writing to accept the child back in your home *before* 15 days expires, the payment continues. After 15 days on the run, the payment is stopped and the placement is closed. If the child returns to your home or a new home *after* 15 days, a new open placement is opened and a new assessment must be done.

*What if the foster parent encounters temporary difficulty with a child?*

The foster care rate may be raised for a selected period of time and not necessarily for a full six months. Shortened foster care rate increases help support the foster parent's increased efforts if the foster child experiences a temporary condition.

What happens when a child is re-assessed due to significant changes in health or behavior?

The social worker or designated rate assessment may do a re-assessment on the child that might increase the level of payment. This rate change can only be applied to current or future care of the child, not past care.

When can a social worker provide additional services?

Additional services can be used with any level child. Approval for such services must come from management at Children's Administration in your region.

Are additional services (special equipment and specialized therapy) part of the foster care rate assessment?

**NO**

Additional services are paid for separately from the monthly foster care reimbursement payment. Payments are made directly to those who provide the services.

What happens with the completed assessment?

A written copy of the assessment will be kept in the child's case file and a history of all assessments authorized for the child is kept in the computer.

What happens if I disagree with the rate assessed?

You can ask for a hearing on the foster care rate. 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 improves in your care and the exceptional tasks you have performed are no longer needed, it is expected the foster care rate will be reduced.

When does a child's foster care payment end?

The payment ends when:

1. The child is returned to the biological parent.
2. The child is adopted.
3. The child turns 18 years old and has graduated from high school.
4. The child, at age 18, voluntarily signs themselves into care until age 21; the reimbursement will end on the child's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday or upon graduation from high school.
5. The child goes to a different foster home.