Levels of Care: Foster Care Licensing

What is Levels of Care?

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) implemented the Levels of Care (LOC) initiative on January 1, 2010, in order to improve stability, safety, and permanence of children by matching their assessed needs with the skills, abilities, and capacities of caregivers.

Changes to federal and state laws, along with additional factors related to placements of children in out-of-home care, contributed to the implementation of Levels of Care.

The Department would like to express gratitude to all caregivers and those caregivers who are considering caring for a child who is in the child welfare system.

Additional Resources:

- Levels of Care
  https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/loc
- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool
  https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cans
- Foster Parent Training
  https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/fostercare/training
- Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership
  https://uwm.edu/mcwp/
- Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System
  https://wcwpds.wisc.edu/
- Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center:
  http://wifostercareandadoption.org/
- DCF Foster Care Memos
  https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy
- DCF Foster Care Contacts:
  https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/about-us/contact-us
- Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
  www.dcf.wisconsin.gov

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How is my Level of Care Certification Determined?

All foster parents are given a Level of Care certification during the foster care licensing process based on meeting the following:

- Qualifications
- Training
- Foster parent references
- Foster parent experience

There are five Levels of Care. Each Level of Care certification has a specific number of training hours, personal references, and experience requirements.

Applicants and foster parents should be involved with their licensing agency in deciding which Level of Care certification to pursue. For more information, be sure to talk to your licensing worker.

Levels of Care

**Level One:** Child-specific licenses only. To be child-specific, the foster parent must be a relative of the child OR have a prior relationship between the foster parent and the child or the child's family.

**Level Two:** Basic foster care.

**Level Three:** Moderate treatment foster care. Foster care that can provide additional supervision and care to children with higher needs than those in basic foster care.

**Level Four:** Specialized treatment foster care. Structured to meet the higher needs of children and often addresses specific population needs, such as teen parents.

**Level Five:** Exceptional treatment foster care. These foster homes have staff members who work in rotating shifts to care for children. Level 5 foster homes are generally created to meet the needs of specific children who need care into adulthood and the home becomes the adult resource

Foster Parent Training Requirements

Being a successful foster parent means continuing to learn through:

- classes and other training methods,
- reading books or magazines,
- talking with other foster parents, and
- continually developing new skills.

Each foster parent must complete training requirements for their Level of Care certification. Training requirements fall into three categories: pre-placement, initial licensing, and ongoing.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool

All children placed in care are assessed using the Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths (CANS) tool. The tool assesses the child’s status on permanence, well-being, level of functioning, and quality of life. Each child will be given a Level of Need based on their CANS scoring and child’s placement will be informed by using the Level of Need of the child and the foster parents’ Level of Care certification.

A foster parent’s Level of Care certification does not need to match the Level of Need of a child placed in their home. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool will help determine the type of services and resources needed to support a placement at a lower assessed level for a child.

LEVELS OF CARE FACTS:
- There has been a steady increase in the number of children placed with relative caregivers statewide.
- Relative caregivers are also increasingly becoming licensed as foster homes, and are receiving increased support by their agency.
- More children are reaching permanence with relatives.
- The number of licensed foster homes continues to increase.
- There is more consistency in foster home licensing statewide.