

NWF Health Network Policy & Procedure

Series:	700: Provider Network & Licensing	
Policy Name:	Foster Care Rates	
Policy Number:	708	
Origination Date:	03/09/2009	Revised: Board Meeting of 09/05/2024
Requirements:	s. 39.5085, F.S. s. 39.4091 F.S. s. 409.145, F.S. s. 409.175, F.S. 65C-28.019, F.A.C. DCF CFOP 170-1	

Referenced Documents:

700-708 x 1 NWFHN Licensed Foster Care Standard Rate and Enhanced Rate Matrix
700-708 x 2 NWFHN Sitter / Home Health Services
700-708 x 3 NWFHN High End Placement Matrix
700-708 x 4 DCF Child Care Subsidy Frequently Asked Questions
700-708 x 5 DCF Memo: Implementation of CH. 2022-68, Laws of Florida (Senate Bill 7034)
700-708 x 6 NWFHN Placement Notification Matrix

Policy

It is the policy of NWF Health Network (NWFHN), to ensure that licensed caregivers receive a consistent level of financial support to cover the needs of dependent children in their care, thereby promoting a stable and nurturing environment for the children's well-being and development.

- A. NWFHN operates as a community-based system of care that enables and empowers caregivers for children in foster care to offer high-quality parenting, allowing them to make decisions regarding a child's participation in activities using the "reasonable and prudent parent standard" as defined in s. 409.145 and in s. 39.4091, Florida Statutes and using "normalcy" as provided in 65C-28.019, F.A.C., giving them the autonomy to make informed decisions that align with the child's best interests.
 1. NWFHN will verify that contracted private agencies providing out-of-home care services to dependent children have policies in place which are consistent with s. 409.145, Florida Statutes, and that these agencies promote and protect the ability of dependent children to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.
 2. NWFHN will provide training to all foster parents and contracted agencies to ensure normalcy for all children in care, pursuant to Sections 39.4091 and 409.145, Florida Statutes.

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- B. Standard Room and Board base rates shall apply as governed within s. 409.175, Florida Statutes. Standard rates may change without notice based on Florida Statutes, Florida Administrative Code, or upon lawful directive by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). If a rate change is required, the rate change will be implemented on the effective date specified by law, rule, or DCF, and this policy and procedure will be updated accordingly. Updates to this policy and procedure reflecting said change(s) shall not prohibit the immediate implementation of said change(s) upon the effective date established by law, rule, or DCF.
1. NWFHN is dedicated to fair and equitable standards in room and board rates, as well as enhanced rates. These standards are to ensure that each child in out-of-home care receives a stable and nurturing environment that meets their unique needs while promoting their well-being and development.
- C. This policy and procedure are applicable to NWFHN employees, volunteers, affiliates, partners that include, but is not limited to, contractors and sub-contractors, foster parents, group home caregivers, and providers.
1. This policy and procedure shall not affect existing contractual agreements between NWFHN and its partners, including, but is not limited to, the contract with the National Youth Advocate Program (NYAP) and Children in Crisis, Inc., ensuring that current commitments and obligations remain intact.
- D. Definitions:
1. "Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard" is the standard of care utilized by a caregiver in determining whether to allow a child in their care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities. This standard is characterized by careful and thoughtful parental decision making that is intended to maintain a child's health, safety, and best interest while encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth.

The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the child's health, safety, and best interests while at the same time encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in out-of-home care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.
 2. "Caregiver" is a person with whom the child is placed in out-of-home care, or a designated official for group care licensed by DCF.
 3. "Age-Appropriate" is an activity or item that is generally accepted as suitable for a child of the same chronological age or level of maturity. Age appropriateness is based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacity which is typical for an age or age group.

Procedure

1. Application of Standard of Care.

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- a. Every child who comes into out-of-home care pursuant to s. 409.145, Florida Statutes, is entitled to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.
 - b. Each caregiver shall use the reasonable and prudent standard in determining whether to give permission for a child living in out-of-home care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.
 - c. When using the reasonable and prudent parent standard, the caregiver must consider the following:
 - i. The child's age, maturity, and developmental level to maintain the overall health and safety of the child.
 - ii. The potential risk factors and the appropriateness of the extracurricular, enrichment, or social activity.
 - iii. The best interest of the child, based on information known by the caregiver.
 - iv. The importance of encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth.
 - v. The importance of providing the child with the most family-like living experience possible.
 - vi. The behavioral history of the child and the child's ability to safely participate in the proposed activity.
2. Room and Board Rate.
- a. Room and board rates shall be paid to foster parents, including relative and nonrelative caregivers who are licensed as a level I child-specific foster placement, and to relative and nonrelative caregivers who are participating in the Relative Caregiver Program and receiving payments.
 - b. The room and board rate will be initiated when a child is sheltered and placed in licensed out-of-home care.
 - i. The NWFHN Out of Home Care team member receiving the licensed placement request shall verify with the requester that diligent efforts to safely place the child with a relative and/or non-relative occurred before making a licensed placement request or is not applicable due to extenuating circumstances.
 - ii. On-going diligent efforts to safely secure a relative and/or non-relative placement for a child placed in licensed out-of-home care shall continue and be documented in the state's electronic case record. When diligent efforts have been exhausted, all efforts and the determination of exhaustion shall be documented in the state's electronic case record.
 - iii. Diligent efforts and documentation of such efforts shall be documented by the primary Child Protective Investigator (CPI) and primary Dependency Case Manager (DCM), or their designee(s). The DCM or designee shall continue diligent efforts upon case transfer from child protective investigations until all diligent efforts are exhausted.
 - c. The room and board rate are intended to contain a portion for allowance, incidentals, and clothing.
3. Standard Rates.

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- a. Any and all payments for placements will be provided as a daily rate which accounts for supervision 24 hours, 7 days a week. Placements that do not conform to such a need, payment and calculation may be based on a formula that is fully justified and easily translated by such a rate calculation as determined NWFHN.
 - b. The following standard base rates shall apply as provided within s. 409.175, Florida Statutes or an increased base rate approved by DCF:
 - i. See Attachment A for approved standard rates.
 - c. Included in the standard room and board rate is a percentage designated for the child's room and board, allowance, incidentals, clothing, and Independent Life Skills Training if age appropriate.
 - i. See Attachment A for approved standard rates and percentages.
 - d. The standard room and board rate begins the day the child is placed into the caregiver's home through the day before the child leaves the caregiver's home. The day the child leaves the home is not counted as a day. Annually, foster parents, including relative and nonrelative caregivers who are licensed as a level I child-specific foster placement and relative and nonrelative caregivers who are participating in the Relative Caregiver Program and receiving payments pursuant to s. 39.5085(2)(d)1. or 2. F.S., shall receive an annual cost of living increase.
 - i. Note: DCF will calculate the new room and board rate increase equal to the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, U.S. City Average, All Items, not seasonally adjusted, or successor reports, for the preceding December compared to the prior December as initially reported by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. DCF will make available the adjusted room and board rates annually.
 - ii. The amount of the monthly room and board rate may be increased upon agreement among NWFHN, the foster parent, and DCF.
 - e. NWFHN will pay a supplemental room and board payment to foster parents, including relative and nonrelative caregivers who are licensed as a level I child-specific foster placement and relative and nonrelative caregivers who are participating in the Relative Caregiver Program and receiving payments pursuant to s. 39.5085(2)(d)1. or 2., on a per-child basis, for providing independent life skills and normalcy supports to children who are 13 through 17 years of age placed in their care. The supplemental payment must be paid monthly in addition to the current monthly room and board rate payment. The supplemental monthly payment shall be based on 10 percent of the monthly room and board rate for children 13 to 18 years of age as provided under this section and adjusted annually.
4. Child Care Subsidy.
- a. Foster parents and relative or nonrelative caregivers, regardless of whether the relative or nonrelative caregivers are licensed as a level I child-specific foster placement or participate in the Relative Caregiver Program, who have a child placed in out-of-home care in the home between the age of birth to school entry shall receive a payment of \$200 per month per child to pay toward the cost of an early learning or child care program.

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- i. See Attachments D and E.
 - b. Sitter/Home Health Services may be available when there is a need for one-on-one oversight for a child in a placement.
 - i. See Attachment B.
5. Enhanced Rates.
- a. All enhanced rate requests shall be reviewed for consideration and approved or denied by NWFHN utilizing the following points of contact and utilizing Attachment A - NWFHN Licensed Foster Care Enhanced Rate Matrix.
 - i. See Attachment A.
 - ii. Foster Homes.
 - 1. Up to \$100.00: NWFHN Assistant Director of Placement.
 - 2. \$100.01 and higher: NWFHN Out of Home Care Director.
 - iii. Group Care.
 - 1. Up to \$350.00 NWFHN Program Manager.
 - 2. \$350.01 to \$426.00: NWFHN Assistant Director of Placement.
 - 3. \$426.01 and higher: NWFHN Out of Home Care Director.
 - b. When a child who is in, or is eligible, for out-of-home licensed care is exhibiting, or is known to have exhibited, special needs such as, but is not limited to, very challenging behaviors or medically complex issues that may require additional services and additional commitment on the part of the licensed caregiver to secure or maintain the placement, the DCM or Placement Specialist may request a review of the room and board rate.
 - c. The DCM will contact the Placement Specialist who will review the child's needs.
 - d. The Placement Specialist will verify that the foster parent has an enhanced level of training or experience to meet the needs of the child.
 - e. Based on the documented behaviors, the Placement Specialist will seek approval as applicable.
6. Determining Enhanced Rates.
- a. NWFHN will utilize the NWFHN Licensed Foster Care Enhanced Rate Matrix in determining enhanced rates.
 - i. See Attachment A – NWFHN Licensed Foster Care Enhanced Rate Matrix.
7. Reassessment of Enhanced Rates.
- a. Change in Child's Needs.

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- i. When licensed foster care enhanced rate matrix tier criteria is no longer met, a reassessment shall occur within one business day.
 - ii. This is applicable to stepping up and down from tiers, as well as determining if an enhanced rate is no longer applicable.
 - iii. This is further applicable to when a child remains in the same placement or there is a recommendation for a change in placement.
 - b. Placement Change Requested.
 - i. When there is a placement change request for a child who is in an enhanced rate placement, a reassessment shall occur within one business day of the placement change request.
 - ii. When a placement change occurs for a child in licensed out-of-home care for any reason:
 1. The worker completing the placement activity or the worker's designee shall immediately (including after normal business hours and holidays) notify NWFHN by email of the placement change and reasoning upon the activity occurring
 - iii. See Attachment F – NWFHN Placement Notification Matrix
 1. The worker completing the placement activity or the worker's designee shall document such activity in the state's electronic system (Notes) within twenty-four (24) hours of such activity occurring and within compliance with DCF Operating Procedures.
 2. The applicable NWFHN Team shall complete the placement update in the state's electronic system within twenty-four (24) hours of such activity occurring and within compliance with DCF Operating Procedures.
 - c. When a reassessment is required, the following shall occur:
 - i. The DCM shall notify the Placement Specialist.
 - ii. The Placement Specialist shall reassess the child's needs.
 - iii. The Placement Specialist will verify that the foster parent has an enhanced level of training or experience to meet the needs of the child, as applicable.
 - iv. The Placement Specialist will seek approval as applicable based on the child's documented behaviors.
 - v. The Placement Specialist will notify the DCM of reassessment outcome.
8. Alternative Placements.
 - a. When an alternative placement occurs, whereas a preferred placement cannot be secured, the Out of Home Care team shall ensure diligent efforts to place in a preferred placement occur to include within the NWFHN service area and outside of the service as applicable.
9. High End Placement Staffings.

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- a. When criteria are met for Enhanced Rates, Group Home Placement, and/or Specialized High End Needs children, the following criteria and cadence shall apply.
- b. The NWFHN Out of Home Care Director or designee shall be responsible for the coordination of the following reviews:
 - i. See Attachment C - High End Placement Staffing Matrix.

10. Overpayments and Recouping Payments.

- a. Room and board payments and other support payments are processed based upon the most accurate information at the time of payment. When an event occurs or information becomes available which alters the amount of the prior payments, this results in a determination that an overpayment has been made. Overpayments shall be repaid by the person receiving the overpayment. NWFHN will ensure lawful and ethical best practices and diligent efforts are completed in recouping payments.
- b. When a partner provider is issued an overpayment for any reason, the partner provider shall immediately return to NWFHN the total amount overpaid.
 - i. When an overpayment is identified by NWFHN, the partner provider will be notified by NWFHN. Should repayment of the amount overpaid not be made forthwith, NWFHN reserves the right to withhold and/or offset the overpayment against any monies due to the partner provider for services.

11. Reporting and Data Analysis.

- a. The NWFHN Out of Home Care Program Director in partnership with the NWFHN Circuit Administrators shall review and ensure a monthly status update report identifying each child under NWFHN purview who is in licensed out-of-home care with an enhanced rate, group care, alternative placement, and specialized high-end placement.
- b. The NWFHN Out of Home Care Program Director shall ensure a monthly status update report identifying contracted empty beds.
- c. A quarterly executive synopsis shall be completed and led by the Office of Quality, Improvement, Training, and Professional Development working in partnership with the Offices of Data Integrity, Out of Home Care, Foster Family Support, Care Coordination, Program Office, Office of Finance, and Circuit Administration.