

Level of Care (LOC) Rate Protocol Instruction Guide

What is LOC Rate Protocol?

The LOC Rate protocol is designed to identify the foster care child/youth needs, the resource family expectations to meet these needs, and match those to the appropriate rate level. The Protocol consists of five domains that cover the primary care and supervision needs of the child/youth. Within each Domain, there are different levels of expectations that correlate with a point system. The protocol allows the social worker/probation officer to score each domain based on the child/youth care and supervision needs to identify the appropriate Level of Care rate, including if applicable, Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC).

The LOC Rate Protocol and Triggering Events

Care and supervision needs will be identified based on five core domains. The Core Domains in the protocol tool are: Physical, Behavioral/Emotional, Educational, Health and Permanency/Family Services. The LOC Rate Protocol is comprised of a Matrix, The Resource Parents Report Tool to be completed by the caregiver, a Scoring Sheet which is to be completed by a Social Worker (SW) or Probation Officer (PO), and the Instruction Guide. The rate, once determined, will be documented by the SW or PO and a copy of the scoring sheet will be provided to Foster Care Eligibility staff.

When to use the LOC Protocol?

There is no annual LOC rate determination requirement. The SW/PO must use the LOC Protocol when one of the following triggering events occurs:

1. **Initial Foster Care Placement:** The Basic Level Rate will be paid upon initial foster care placement into a HBFC setting pending the completion of the LOC protocol unless the child meets an exception for an ISFC rate - the results of the LOC protocol is effective the date of initial placement. County staff has 60 days after initial placement to complete the LOC Rate Protocol.
2. **FFA – Moving from Age-Based Rates:** For a change in placement for any foster child/youth moving from an FFA home receiving a rate under the age-based rate structure to another FFA home (with a different FFA agency) or a relative/county home. If the LOC rate determination was not completed prior to the placement move, the Basic Level Rate shall be paid until the LOC Protocol is completed. If a move is planned, the social worker may begin the assessment prior to the child's placement change; otherwise the LOC Rate should be determined no later than 60 days after placement into the new home. The new LOC rate based on the LOC protocol is effective back to the date of the new placement.
3. **Other RF Placement Changes:** If an LOC rate determination has been performed and there are no changes to the child's needs, the prior LOC rate may be applied. If the LOC rate determination was not completed prior to the new placement, the Basic Level Rate is paid until the LOC determination is completed. The new rate is effective back to the date of placement.
4. **Transition from STRTP:** For a change in placement for any foster child/youth from an STRTP to a HBFC setting. If the LOC rate determination was not completed prior to the new placement, the Basic Level Rate shall be paid until the LOC Rate Protocol is

completed. The new LOC rate based on the LOC Rate Protocol is effective back to the date of the new placement into the HBFC setting.

5. **Requested Changes from Caregivers:** When a caregiver, youth or SW/PO in consultation with the CFT (if available), indicates a child/youth's needs have changed, the new rate is effective the date of the completion of the LOC Rate Protocol as indicated on the form provided by the SW.
6. **Transition from ISFC/TFC:** When a child/youth is receiving ISFC or TFC and is ending those services, the new LOC rate is effective the date the ISFC or TFC services end.
7. **Decrease in Rate:** In the instance when the rate decreases as a result of the LOC Rate Protocol and the child remains with the same caregiver, the effective date of the decrease will be in the first month following the determination in which adequate and timely notice can be provided.

How to use the LOC Rate Protocol?

The Child Welfare Social Worker (SW) or Probation Officer (PO) must consider all the needs of the child/youth in every domain and what services and support will be needed for quality supervision in a family setting. Those expectations are listed in the LOC Rate Protocol. The SW/PO should consider all available information including but not limited to the Child and Family Team (CFT), existing assessment content (i.e., CANS, TOP, etc.), insight from the Resource Parents Report Tool in order to rate each domain thoroughly and accurately. The SW/PO will use the accompanying scoring sheet to score each domain and arrive at a total score that converts into a level of care rate.

Static Criteria (For New and Current Placements)

The Protocol recognizes that there are situations where a child/youth has recent experiences or events that present challenges for the SW/PO to place into a typical resource family home. The Protocol also includes an option for SW/PO to place at an ISFC rate (with supervision approval) for up to 60 days pending a full assessment (within this timeframe). This placement would be for a child/youth whose trauma or behaviors require enhanced supervision or intensive services. This option should only be exercised when no other appropriate and safe home-based placements can be found for the immediate placement of the child/youth. The initial 60-day placement may be extended upon manager approval.

LOC Scoring Sheet:

The scoring sheet is an outcome of the LOC Matrix and must be completed after determining the intensity of child's needs and expectations in each domain.

How to complete the scoring sheet:

- In addition to the instruction on the Scoring Sheet, below is a list of general instructions and guidelines:

General Instructions

1. Complete this form after reviewing and determining the level of intensity/expectation

- in each domain of the Level of Care Rate Determination Matrix.
2. Print clearly or type all information requested.
 3. Child ID: This would be either the CWS/CMS ID number or as defined by your county.
 4. Age: Child age in years only.
 5. Case Carrying Worker: This would be either the social worker, probation officer or a county designee. You may change the title as needed.
 6. Sections A-F: Please follow the instruction guide in the grey box.
 7. Leveling up Guide: Scores less than 21 means 20 or less and Scores less than 23 means 22 or less. Child has to score 5 or more in Behavioral or Health in order to move up a level.
 8. Verify that the form is complete and correct, once printed no corrections may be made. If any error has been made, complete a new form.
 9. Sign the form in the designated signature area based on your role. You may change the title as needed.
 10. Effective date: Which is the date that the Resource Family will start the new rate
 11. Keep a copy of this form and all other supporting documents in the child case file or as directed by your county.

LOC Digital Scoring Sheet:

- The digital scoring sheet is designed to calculate the total score and identify the appropriate level of care including the leveling up override.
- Please consider using the digital scoring sheet to avoid any errors in totaling the scores and identifying the appropriate level of care.

Additional Resources:

- [ACL 17-11 \(1/31/2017\)](#): Phase II implementation of the HBFC and STRTP Rates Structure and Conversion Process to the New Rate Structure
- [ACL 16-84 \(10/7/2016\)](#): Requirements and Guidelines for Creating and Providing a Child and Family Team
- [ACL 16-79 \(9/22/2016\)](#): Information about HBFC and STRTP Rates Structure and Conversion Process to the New Rate Structure
- [ACL 16-57 \(7/1/2016\)](#): Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC) California Necessities Index (CNI) Increases and Other Rate Increases
- [LOC Webinar \(3/14/2017\)](#): CCR Overview of the Level of Care Protocol