



wisconsin department of
children & families

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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Division of Safety and Permanence

July, 2011

Dear Foster Parent:

Recently, there have been a number of changes affecting foster care in Wisconsin. These changes include Levels of Care, the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool (“the CANS”), and changes in your foster care rates. This letter along with the enclosed attachments provides information to address any questions or concerns you may have regarding these changes. Included with this letter are a brochure titled “Levels of Care: Foster Care Licensing,” a brochure titled “Information for Families Regarding the Wisconsin Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool,” and the “Placement Complexity Chart,” which is an appendix of Ch. DCF 56, Admin. Code. You can also visit our website at: http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/levels_of_care/default.htm for more information.

As a foster parent you should know what the use of the CANS will mean for your foster child. The CANS tool assesses a child’s needs and strengths in different areas such as school, trauma, mental health needs, and risk behaviors. The CANS uses algorithms to provide three different results:

- a mental health screen, to determine whether a child has mental health needs
- a Level of Need, to recommend a level of placement for a child based on the identified needs and strengths
- a supplemental rate to be included in the foster care reimbursement.

The attached Placement Complexity Chart shows the appropriate placement options for a child based on their Level of Need. A specific Level of Need does not require a specific provider or placement, but it will be used to help choose a placement based on the child’s identified needs. A child may be placed with a provider who has a lower level of certification than the Level of Need if an exception is documented to show additional supports will be given to that provider. The Level of Need will be used to better match children to their providers and to improve the stability of placements.

The CANS is completed by the child’s primary caseworker, however, foster care licensing code requires the primary caseworker collect information from members of the child’s treatment team, including you.

A supplemental rate will be determined by ratings on specific items. The supplemental rate is calculated for a child by adding the items included in the algorithm scored as a ‘2’ or a ‘3’ and multiplying that number by \$5.50. The attached CANS brochure explains the rating scale for the CANS.

The supplemental rate is only one portion of the foster care rate; the basic maintenance payment is set by the legislature based on the child’s age, and the exceptional rate is determined by the agency based on specific criteria. Your licensing worker can provide you with the Uniform Foster Care Rate brochure to further explain the portions of the foster care rate.

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The department's policy requires that all children who were placed into foster care on or after February 21, 2011 have a CANS completed within 30 days of placement into a foster home, and have a CANS reassessment every six months. Children who were in foster care prior to February 21, 2011, are required to have a CANS completed at the next rate review, so all children in foster care in Wisconsin will have a CANS completed by August 2011. Regardless of when a child has their first CANS, a CANS reassessment is required every six months. You or other members of the treatment team can request a reassessment of the CANS at any time if you feel that the child's needs or strengths have changed.

We believe that the Levels of Care and the CANS tool will help to create better outcomes for the children in foster care, and we hope this information was helpful in answering some of your questions. Please contact your licensing worker if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Hermes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ron Hermes
Director
Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care
Division of Safety and Permanence
Department of Children and Families

Information for Families Regarding the Wisconsin Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool

What is the purpose of the CANS?

All children placed in out-of-home care in Wisconsin will have an assessment completed using the Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths (CANS) tool. The assessment uses outcome measures to assess clinical status, well-being, level of functioning and quality of life. The CANS tool will better inform case managers, foster care coordinators, licensing agencies, and foster parents on the needs and strengths of the child being placed in out of home care. Children will be matched using the CANS and the foster parents' Level of Care. This will lead to more stability in placement and promote positive outcomes. Supplemental Rates will be determined using the CANS of the child and training and experience the foster parents offer.

In addition to assessing a child, the CANS will also assess a child's current caregiver as well as the caregiver who has been identified as the permanent resource for that child. This information will help in matching a child to a caregiver who can meet the needs of that child.

How do I use the CANS to build consensus on my treatment team?

The CANS is intended to be a communication tool. You can use the CANS to facilitate communication and consensus within your treatment team by sharing the ratings with the team and ensuring that all members are in agreement with the assessment. Discussions about agreement on how the child's needs and strengths are described provides the foundation for agreement about what approaches to take to address those needs and identify and build strengths. The CANS items will become the language by which these issues are discussed.

How does this affect me?

As a member of a child's team, you will have input into the CANS assessment. The CANS is to be used to build consensus in a team in order to create a treatment plan for a child. You will be able to express your opinion on the items rated in the CANS, and will have access to a copy of the final assessment. If you do not agree with the outcome of a child's CANS assessment or do not have input in the CANS, talk with the child's caseworker. The results of the CANS will determine the Supplemental Rate for a foster care provider.

Does this mean my child will not be able to be placed with my relatives?

No, not necessarily. The CANS will help you and your child's team to determine the most appropriate placement for your child by assessing possible caregivers for your child. If one of your relatives has been identified as a possible caregiver for your child, they will be assessed using the CANS also to see if they are the most appropriate for your child.



How is the CANS different from other measures?

The CANS is unique in several ways:

- The CANS is about the child, not about the service. If a child is receiving services that are masking a need, this is factored into the ratings. For example, a hyperactive child on stimulants is still rated a '2' as long as you have to work to control symptoms with medications.
- The CANS is focused on the current behavior, not the reason behind it. Another way to think about this is that the CANS is about the "what," not the "why" of a behavior.
- In rating items, the CANS uses a 30-day window unless otherwise specified.

The CANS assess domains of needs and strengths, and the two are scored on a scale of zero to three.

For needs:

- A rating of 0 indicates no evidence, or no need for action on this item.
- A rating of 1 indicates that this item will require some prevention or monitoring.
- A rating of 2 indicates that this item requires action by the treatment team.
- A rating of 3 indicates that this item requires immediate or intensive action.

For strengths:

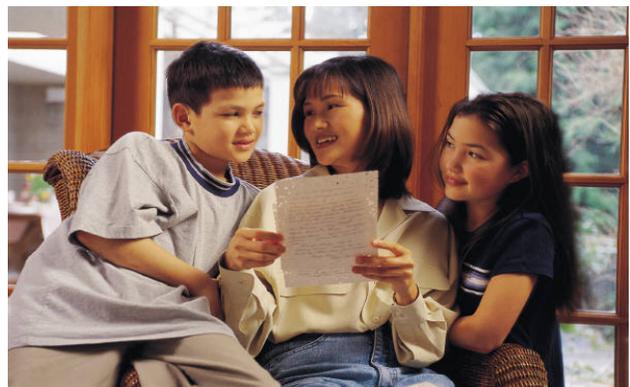
- A rating of 0 indicates a centerpiece strength, something so powerful it can be the focus of a strength-based plan.
- A rating of 1 indicates that this item is a useful strength for that child or caregiver.
- A rating of 2 indicates that this item is a potential strength that has been identified but must be developed further.
- A rating of 3 indicates no strength has been identified for this item.

Is there a charge for using the CANS?

The CANS is an open domain tool that is free to use. The copyright is held by the Buddin Praed Foundation. A very large number of individuals including professionals, parents, and youth have participated in the creation of the various CANS tools. Training and certification is required for the use of the CANS.

Is the CANS reliable and valid?

Yes. There is a large body of research demonstrating that the CANS is reliable both in training and field applications. Unlike most assessments, CANS completed in the field can be audited for accuracy. The audit reliability of the CANS has been reported to be 0.85. In order to be certified in the CANS, you must demonstrate reliability on a case vignette of 0.70 or greater. The validity of the CANS has been demonstrated with its correlation with other measures and with its demonstrated ability to identify children and youth who will benefit through placement in different programs and levels of care.



Who will complete the CANS?

The CANS can only be completed by an individual who has been trained and certified in its use. Re-certification is required on an annual basis.

The CANS will be completed within 30 days of placement into a foster home and will be updated every six months.

Where I can learn more?

Visit the Levels of Care page of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families website: http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/levels_of_care/default.htm

You can also visit the Buddin Praed Foundation website at www.buddinpraed.org or for the most comprehensive description of the history and development of the CANS approach, see the book "Redressing the Emperor: Improving our children's public mental health services system". (2004). Praeger, Westport, CT.

One Administrative Rule:

As of January 1, 2011, Ch. DCF 38 Administrative Rule was incorporated into Ch. DCF 56 Administrative Rule to create one foster care licensing code. The purpose of this change is to have one rule for foster care regardless of the Level of Care certification of the foster parents. Foster parents will be required to follow all licensing requirements in DCF 56 that apply to them.

Additionally, the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool was incorporated to provide a consistent means to assess the needs and strengths of children in foster care and their caregivers. The implementation of the Levels of Care structure will lead to improved outcomes for both foster parents and children in out-of-home care. If you have questions regarding this change, please contact your Foster Care Coordinator.

How is my Level of Care Certification Determined?

All foster parents licensed in the state of Wisconsin will be assigned a Level of Care certification during the foster care licensing process based on meeting specific requirements in each of these categories:

- Qualifications
- Training
- Caregiver references
- Caregiver experience

Each of the five Levels of Care certifications has been assigned specific number of training hours, personal references, and experience requirements.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool

- All children placed in care will be assessed using the Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths (CANS) tool. The tool uses outcome measures to assess 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.

- Placement of children will be informed by using the Level of Need determination of the child and the foster parents' Level of Care certification. This will lead to more stability in placement and promote positive outcomes.
 - The placement of children currently in your care should not be disrupted because of these changes.
 - This simply means there will be an increased emphasis on what supports the agency is putting in place to ensure children who are placed in your home and the caregivers who are supporting these children are receiving the necessary supports and services to continue to care for the child.
- The CANS tool will better inform caseworkers, Foster Care Coordinators, licensing agencies, families and foster parents on the needs and strengths of the child being placed in out-of-home care for case planning purposes.

Changes to the Uniform Foster Care Rate Setting Process:

- The standardized CANS tool will lead to improved consistency for the Uniform Foster Care Rate Setting process across placing agencies in Wisconsin.
- Supplemental Rates will be determined using the CANS scoring of the child, the child's Level of Need, and Level of Care certification of the provider.
- There is a new provision under the Exceptional Rates which allows rates that were in existence prior to the implementation on February 21, 2011 to remain the same if the child's needs have not significantly changed.



Additional Resources:

- Learn more about the Levels of Care at (this includes more specific resources related to the CANS tool in WI):
http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/levels_of_care/default.htm
- Learn more about the CANS tool at:
<http://www.praedfoundation.org>
- DCF Foster Care Memos:
<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/polmemo/polmemo1NX.htm>
- DCF Foster Care Contacts:
<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/contact/ques.htm>
- WI Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center:
<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster/contact/ques.htm>
- WI Department of Children and Families:
www.dcf.wisconsin.gov



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Levels of Care: Foster Care Licensing

What does this mean for Foster Parents?

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is making changes to the Foster Care program to continue to promote positive outcomes for children placed in foster care. To do this, DCF has implemented the Levels of Care (LOC) initiative 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 Department's moving forward with the changes to the Foster Care Program. DCF 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.

Appendix A

Placement Complexity Chart

		Placement Options		
Child's Level of Need	Provider's Level of Care	Foster Home	Group Home	Residential Care Center
1/2	1	Child-Specific		
	2	Basic		
3	3	Moderate Treatment	Group Home	
4	4	Specialized Treatment		
5	5	Exceptional Treatment		Residential Care Center
6	6			

	Step-down level to be used for transition planning to a less restrictive placement setting.
	Placement of children at this level is not appropriate.

Note: A child in foster care can be served by a foster home with a certification lower than the child's level of need if an exception has been granted and documented in the child's electronic case record by the placing agency and the agency shows what services and supports will be provided to meet the child's needs.