



Determining Dependency Status and Addressing Special Circumstances

FAFSA Summer Training – August 2016

Dependency Status

- Definition of Parent
- Dependency Questions (with special focus on):
 - Homeless students
 - Special circumstances
 - Other options

Who Qualifies as Parent?

- Who is considered a parent
 - Biological parents
 - Adoptive parents
 - Stepparents, if they are married to the student's biological or adoptive parent

Who Qualifies as Parent?

- Who is not considered a parent on the FAFSA (will never have provide info on the FAFSA):
 - Foster parents
 - Legal guardians who have not adopted the student
 - Relatives who have not adopted the student
 - Stepparents who have not adopted the student and who would be the only person providing parental information

Determining Dependency Status

- In order to be considered independent, students must be able to answer yes to at least one question in the dependency section of the FAFSA

Determining Dependency Status

Student Demographics	School Selection	Dependency Status	Parent Demographics	Financial Information	Sign & Submit	Confirmation
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STUDENT

Dependency Determination

Application was successfully saved.

Were you born before January 1, 1993?
 Yes No

As of today, are you married?
 Yes No

At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, will you be working on a master's or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, or graduate certificate, etc.)?
 Yes No

Do you now have or will you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017?
 Yes No

Do you have dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30, 2017?
 Yes No

Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training?
 Yes No

Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?
 Yes No

At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
 Yes No

As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor?
 Yes No

Does someone other than your parent or stepparent have legal guardianship of you, as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
 Yes No

On or after July 1, 2015, were you homeless or were you self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
 Yes No

Help and Hints

Is Student Homeless or At Risk of Being Homeless?

Select **Yes** if any time after July 1, 2015, you were homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.

Select **No** if you are not homeless or at risk of being homeless.

- Homeless** means lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing.
- You may be homeless if you are living in shelters, parks, motels or cars, or temporarily living with other people because you have nowhere else to go. Also, if you are living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent you may be considered homeless.

The “Easy” Questions

- Born before 1/1/93 (for 16–17 FAFSA) – 24 years old
- Married
- Graduate or professional student

Children & Dependents Questions

- Have children and provide more than half their support?
- Dependents (other than spouse and children) and provide more than half their support?

Military and Veteran Questions

- Active duty military for purposes other than training
 - National Guard or Reserves only if they were called up to active Federal duty
- Veteran
 - Has engaged in the active duty in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard; and was released under a condition other than dishonorable.

Orphan, Foster Care, Ward of Court

- Orphan, foster care, dependent/ward of the court
 - No living parent (biological or adoptive) at any time since turning age 13
 - In foster care at any time since turning age 13
 - A ward of the court at any time since turning age 13

- Emancipated minor
 - Answer “Yes” if:
 - Student has a court decision that he/she is an emancipated minor or was immediately prior to turning 18

 - Answer “No” if:
 - Student is still a minor and the court decision is no longer in effect
 - Court decision was not in effect when student turned age 18

■ Legal guardianship

- Answer “Yes” if:
 - Student has court decision he/she is in legal guardianship or was immediately prior to turning 18
- Answer “No” if:
 - Student is still a minor and the court decision is no longer in effect
 - Court decision was not in effect when student turned age 18

- Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
 - Question on the FAFSA reads:
 - “At any time on or after July 1, 2015 (16-17 FAFSA) were you an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were you self supporting and at risk of being homeless?”

- Homeless youth definitions (from the FSA Handbook - AVG):
 - **At risk of being homeless** - when a student's housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
 - **Homeless** - lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
 - **Self-supporting** - when a student pays for his own living expenses, including fixed, regular, and adequate housing.
 - **Unaccompanied** - when a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
 - **Youth** - a student who is 21 years old or younger or still enrolled in high school as of the date he signs the application.

- Students age 22 or 23 are not youth and cannot answer yes to this question.
 - These students must go through the special circumstances review.
- As of the 2018-19 FAFSA, the definition of youth will be removed so students age 22 or 23 will be able to answer yes to the homeless question.

- If the answer is yes, three additional questions appear:

On or after July 1, 2015, were you homeless or were you self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

At any time on or after July 1, 2015, did the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

- If a student has documentation from one of the below, the student should answer yes to one of the previous questions:
 - A school district homeless liaison;
 - The director (or designee) of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; or
 - The director (or designee) of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program.

- If a student doesn't have documentation so isn't able to answer yes to any of the three questions, s/he will see the following:

Homeless Circumstances

You indicated that you were homeless or at risk of being homeless and you answered "no" to all of the specific homeless questions.

However, your financial aid administrator could make a determination that you are a **homeless youth**, and do not need to provide parental information, if you meet both of the following conditions:

- **You are homeless**, which means you are lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing, which includes living in shelters, parks, motels or cars, or temporarily living with other people because you had nowhere else to go. Also, if you are living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent you may be considered homeless even if your parent would provide support and a place to live; and
- **You are unaccompanied**, which means you are not living in the physical custody of your parent or guardian.

If you believe that you meet these conditions and would like to follow up with the financial aid administrator at your college, select "I am homeless or at risk of being homeless" and click **Next** to get additional information.

If you do not meet the above conditions and will be providing parental information, select "I will provide parental information" and click **Next** to continue.

- I will provide parental information
- I am homeless or at risk of being homeless



- If a student doesn't have and cannot get documentation from any of these authorities, a financial aid administrator (FAA) must make this determination.
- Documentation that an FAA may consider includes (but is not limited to):
 - Local school district personnel
 - State homeless education coordinators
 - Staff from college access programs (TRIO, GEAR UP)
 - Mental health professionals, social workers, doctors, and clergy

- The determination may be based on a documented interview with the student if no written documentation available.
- “If the institution has no conflicting information about the status of the student, the institution should not request additional documentation.”
(GEN-15-16)

- Important Dear Colleague Letter – GEN 15-16
 - Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determinations - July 29, 2015
 - Documentation is often not required
 - Focus on whether or not student is homeless or at risk – not why
 - Concern about school unnecessarily restrict access to aid

Common FAFSA Questions

- Permanent mailing address
 - Students should use an address where they can receive mail reliably
 - School, trusted mentor, family member

- Number of people in household
 - Do not include people who are living in the same housing situation
 - Generally, the answer will be “1”

- Signatures
 - If independent, only the student’s signature is required

Determining Dependency Status

- What if the student cannot answer yes to any of the dependency questions?

Determining Dependency Status

STUDENT

Dependency Status Results

Based on your answers to the dependency status questions, you are considered a dependent student. This means you must provide [parental](#) information. Select "I will provide parental information" and click Next to continue to Parent Demographics.

If you have a special circumstance and are unable to provide parental information, under very limited circumstances, you may be able to submit your FAFSA without parental information. Select "I am unable to provide parental information" and click Next to get additional information.

- I will provide parental information
- I am unable to provide parental information

PREVIOUS

NEXT

Help and Hints

Dependency Status Results

For dependent students, a special circumstance is a situation that exists between the student applicant and his or her parent(s) which prevents the student from providing parental information.

Select I will provide parental information to continue to Parent Demographics.

Special Circumstances

- The parents are incarcerated
- Student left home due to abusive environment
- Student does not know where parents are and is unable to contact them

Special Circumstances

- Student submits FAFSA, but it is incomplete
- EFC is not calculated
- Must follow up with the financial aid officer at the college

Special Circumstances

- Student must provide written evidence:
 - Court or law enforcement documents
 - Letters from a clergy member or social worker
 - Letters from a school counselor
 - Any other relevant data

Not Special Circumstances

- Parents do not want to provide information
- Parents refuse to help pay for college
- Parents do not claim student as dependent on income taxes
- Student does not live with the parents

Not Special Circumstance Unsub Eligibility

- No special circumstances and can't provide parent information - typically not eligible for federal aid.
- However, may be eligible for Unsubsidized Loan only.
 - Need written statement from parents stating:
 - They refuse to complete the FAFSA
 - They refuse to provide financial support

- Financial aid administrator makes the final determination
- Decision cannot be appealed to US DOE
- Decision made at one college may differ from another college
- May have to provide documentation each year



Questions?

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