



**Determining Dependency Status
and Addressing Special Circumstances
Wednesday Webinar**

February 2017

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


Help

Student Demographics

School Selection

Dependency Status

Parent Demographics

Financial Information

Sign & Submit

Confirmation

Dependency Determination

Application was successfully saved.

Were you born before January 1, 1994?
 Yes No

As of today, are you married?
 Yes No

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 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, 2017 and June 30, 2018?
 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, 2018?
 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, 2016, were you homeless or were you self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
 Yes No

Help and Hints

Is or Was Student in Legal Guardianship?


Question 55

For this question, the definition of legal guardianship does not include your parents, even if they were appointed by a court to be your guardian. You are also not considered a legal guardian of yourself.

Select **Yes** if you can provide a copy of a court's decision that as of today you are in legal guardianship.

Also select **Yes** if you can provide a copy of a court's decision that you were in a legal guardianship immediately before you reached the age of being an adult in your state. The court must be located in your state of legal residence at the time

STUDENT



The “Easy” Questions

- Born before 1/1/94 (for 17–18 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, 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, 2016 (17-18 FAFSA) were you 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.
- Specific follow up questions will also use these terms:
 - **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, 2016, were you homeless or were you self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

Yes No

At any time on or after July 1, 2016, 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, 2016, 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, 2016, 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 from one of the three identified parties, the student will see the following:

Homeless or at Risk of Being Homeless

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

However, your financial aid administrator can decide that you meet both of the following conditions necessary to be considered homeless and, therefore, do not need to provide parental information:

- **You are homeless**, which means you are lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing, which includes living in shelters, parks, motels, hotels, public spaces, camping grounds, cars, abandoned buildings, 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 otherwise provide 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 the college you plan to attend, select "I am unaccompanied and either homeless or at risk of being homeless" and click **Next** to get additional information.

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

I am unaccompanied and either homeless or at risk of being homeless
 I will provide parental information

[PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#)

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- If the student checks on the unaccompanied and homeless or at risk of being homeless box, the following will appear:

Unable to Provide Parental Information

You told us that you are or are at risk of being homeless. Review the following to continue.

You may submit your FAFSA without parental information. However, we will not calculate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is the index used by colleges to determine how much student aid you are eligible to receive. In order to find out how much student aid you are eligible to receive, **you must follow up with the financial aid administrator at the college you plan to attend.**

Only your financial aid administrator can make the determination that you meet the homeless conditions and are therefore not required to provide parental information.

If you are able to get written evidence of your situation from people like school counselors, social workers, service providers, or clergy, you should provide this information to your financial aid administrator.

If you are not able to obtain written evidence of your homeless status, your financial aid administrator may make a determination about your status based on a documented interview with you. After reviewing your circumstances carefully, your financial aid administrator will decide if you meet the homeless conditions.

Remember, we will not calculate your EFC until you have received a determination of homeless status from your financial aid administrator. You should be aware of any approaching deadlines for your state, college, or scholarship aid.

Select one of the following options and click **Next** to continue.

I am unable to provide parental information and acknowledge that I must follow up with my financial aid administrator

I will provide parental information

[PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#)

for ME ✓

- The student must follow up with 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

Determining Dependency Status

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

Determining Dependency Status

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.

- If the student indicates that they are not able to provide parent information, the following will appear:

Special Circumstances

Important: You told us that you think you have a special circumstance and are unable to provide parental information. Before we allow you to proceed and skip the parental section of your FAFSA we must advise you of the following:

Under Federal law to the extent your family is able, they are primarily responsible for paying for your college expenses. To determine how much your family can afford to pay towards your college expenses, we must collect your financial information and your parents' financial information.

However, Federal law allows for some exceptions, if you have a special circumstance. The following are **examples** of some special circumstances where you may submit your FAFSA without providing parental information:

- Your parents are incarcerated; or
- You have left home due to an abusive family environment; or
- You do not know where your parents are and are unable to contact them (and you have not been adopted).

But not all situations are considered a special circumstance. The following are situations that would **not** be considered a special circumstance:

- Your parents do not want to provide their information on your FAFSA; or
- Your parents refuse to contribute to your college expenses; or
- Your parents do not claim you as a dependent on their income taxes; or
- You do not live with your parents.

Now that you have reviewed the information above, select one of the following options and click **Next** to continue.

I will provide parental information
 I have a special circumstance and I am unable to provide parental information
 I do not have a special circumstance but I am unable to provide parental information

[PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#)

for ME ✓

- Example of 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

Not Special Circumstances

- Situations that are 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

Special Circumstances

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

Unable to Provide Parental Information

You told us that you are unable to provide parental information. Review the following to continue.

You may submit your FAFSA without parental information. However, we will not calculate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is the index used by colleges to determine how much student aid you are eligible to receive. In order to find out how much student aid you are eligible to receive, **you must follow up with the financial aid administrator at the college you plan to attend.**

If you are approaching any deadlines for your state, college, or scholarship aid, you may want to contact your financial aid administrator **before** submitting your FAFSA without parental data.

Once you submit your FAFSA without parental data, you must follow up with the financial aid administrator at the college you plan to attend, in order to complete your FAFSA and receive an EFC.

Under Federal law, only your financial aid administrator has the authority to decide whether or not you must provide parental information on your FAFSA.

You will have to provide documentation to verify your situation. Gather as much written evidence of your situation as you can. Written evidence may include court or law enforcement documents, letters from a clergy member, school counselor or social worker, and/or any other relevant data that explains your special circumstance.

Select one of the following options and click **Next** to continue.

- I am unable to provide parental information and acknowledge that I must follow up with my financial aid administrator
- I will provide parental information

PREVIOUS

NEXT

- 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 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.

Not Special Circumstance Unsub Eligibility

- No EFC is calculated
- Must follow up with FAA and provide a written statement from parents stating that:
 - They refuse to complete the FAFSA
 - They refuse to provide financial support

Unable to Provide Parental Information

You told us that you are unable to provide parental information. Review the following to continue.

You may submit your FAFSA without parental information. However, we will not calculate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is the index used by colleges to determine how much student aid you are eligible to receive. In order to find out how much student aid you are eligible to receive, **you must follow up with the financial aid administrator at the college you plan to attend.**

If you are approaching any deadlines for your state, college, or scholarship aid, you may want to contact your financial aid administrator **before** submitting your FAFSA without parental data.

Once you submit your FAFSA without parental data, you must follow up with the financial aid administrator at the college you plan to attend, in order to complete your FAFSA and receive an EFC.

Under Federal law, only your financial aid administrator has the authority to decide whether or not you must provide parental information on your FAFSA.

You will have to provide documentation to verify your situation. Generally, you must submit a written statement from your parents stating that they refuse to complete the FAFSA and that they do not and will not provide you with any financial support.

After reviewing your circumstances carefully, **your financial aid administrator will decide** if you must provide parental information or if your circumstances allow you to proceed without providing parental data. **Your financial aid administrator's decision is final** and cannot be appealed to Federal Student Aid.

Select one of the following options and click **Next** to continue.

- I am unable to provide parental information and acknowledge that I must follow up with my financial aid administrator
- I will provide parental information

PREVIOUS NEXT

Works for ME ✓

- 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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