

Who is my parent according to the FAFSA® form?

If you need to report parent information, here are some guidelines to help you:

- If your legal parents (your biological and/or adoptive parents, or parents as determined by the state [e.g., a parent listed on your birth certificate]) are married to each other, answer the questions about both of them, regardless of whether your parents are of the same or opposite sex.
- If your legal parents are not married to each other and live together, answer the questions about both of them, regardless of whether your parents are of the same or opposite sex.
- If your legal parent is widowed or was never married, answer the questions about that parent.

What if my parents are divorced or separated?

In this case, how you fill out the [FAFSA form](#) depends on whether your parents live together or not.

Keep the following in mind as you read this section:

- For FAFSA purposes, your married parents are separated if they are considered legally separated by a state, or if they are legally married but have chosen to live separate lives, including living in separate households, as though they were not married.
- When two married persons live as a married couple but are separated by physical distance (or have separate households), they are considered married for FAFSA purposes.

Divorced or Separated Parents Who Do Not Live Together

If your parents are divorced or separated and don't live together, answer the questions about the parent with whom you lived with more during the past 12 months.

If you lived the same amount of time with each divorced or separated parent, give answers about the parent who provided more financial support during the past 12 months or during the most recent 12 months that you actually received support from a parent.

Divorced or Separated Parents Who Live Together

If your **divorced** parents live together, you'll indicate their marital status as "Unmarried and both legal parents living together," and you will answer questions about both of them on the FAFSA form.

If your **separated** parents live together, you'll indicate their marital status as "Married or remarried" (NOT "Divorced or separated"), and you will answer questions about both of them on the FAFSA form.

What if I have a stepparent?

If you have a stepparent who is married to the legal parent whose information you're reporting, you must provide information about that stepparent as well.

EXCEPTION: The FAFSA form asks about your parents' education level. For these two questions, your parents are considered to be your birth parents or adoptive parents—your stepparent is not your parent for these questions.

What if my stepparent is widowed?

If your stepparent was married to your parent but is now widowed, that stepparent doesn't count as a parent on your FAFSA form unless your stepparent has legally adopted you.

What if my parents are in a same-sex marriage?

Same-sex couples must report their marital status as married if they were legally married in a state or other jurisdiction (foreign country), without regard to where they live or where the student will be going to school.

What if I live with someone other than my parents?

It doesn't matter if you don't live with your parent or parents; you still must report information about them. The following people are not your parents unless they have legally adopted you: grandparents, foster parents, legal guardians, older brothers or sisters, uncles or aunts, and widowed stepparents.

What if my parents are unwilling to provide their information on my FAFSA® form?

You can't be considered independent of your parents just because they refuse to help you with the FAFSA form. Still, we do understand that in some cases, the parents are not supporting the dependent student at all and refuse to provide their information on the student's application. If you're in that situation, here's the process for filling out the FAFSA form online:

1. When the FAFSA form asks you to provide information about your parents, select the "I am unable to provide information about my parent(s)" option.
2. You will then be provided with an explanation of what's considered a special circumstance. After reading through the options, select the one that says you don't have a special circumstance, but you still can't provide parent information.

3. The application explains that if your parents don't support you and refuse to provide their information on the application, you may submit your FAFSA form without their information. However, you won't be able to get any [federal student aid](#) other than an [unsubsidized Direct Loan](#)—and even that might not happen. The decision is up to the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend. If you agree to this, you may submit your FAFSA form without parent information.
4. Your FAFSA information will be sent to the colleges you list, but you won't get an EFC.
5. You must immediately contact your school's financial aid office to discuss the possibility of getting an unsubsidized [Direct Loan](#). The financial aid office may ask for a written statement from your parents, indicating that they refuse to provide their information on the FAFSA form and that they no longer support you. (Forms of support include allowing you to live in their home, including you on their car or health insurance, providing a car to drive on a regular basis, and payment of your tuition or fees.)
6. The financial aid office will look at your situation and decide whether you may receive an unsubsidized Direct Loan. That decision is final and cannot be appealed to the U.S. Department of Education.

If you're considering following this process, think about this first: If you submit your FAFSA form without parent information, you will not receive an EFC. Some state- or school-based aid programs look at the EFC in order to determine your eligibility for their funds; because you won't have an EFC, you won't be considered for those financial aid programs. You could be giving up a chance at many sources of financial aid. So encourage your parents to provide their information—doing so won't require them to support you in any way, it'll just help you be considered for as many sources of financial aid as possible.

What if I'm unable to provide parent information due to special circumstances?

In situations such as the ones below, you may be able to submit your FAFSA form without parent information despite being considered a dependent student:

- Your parents are incarcerated.
- You do not know where your parents are and are unable to contact them (and you have not been adopted).
- You are considered an unaccompanied, and are either homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless youth by a McKinney Vento School District Liaison, Director (or designee) of a HUD-funded shelter, and Director (or designee) of RHYA-funded shelter.

If you are filling out the FAFSA form online, you will be asked whether you are able to provide information about your parents. If you are not, you will have the option to indicate

that you have special circumstances that make you unable to get your parents' information. You will then be able to submit your application without entering data about your parents.

However, it is important for you to understand the following:

- Although your FAFSA form will be submitted, it will not be fully processed. You will not receive an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and must immediately contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend.
- The financial aid staff may ask for additional information to determine whether you can be considered independent and have an EFC calculated without parent data. Gather as much written evidence regarding your situation as you can. Written evidence may include court or law enforcement documents; letters from a clergy member, school counselor, or social worker; letters from a director or a designee of a program funded under a TRIO or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for an Undergraduate program ("GEAR UP") grant; and/or any other relevant data that explains your special circumstance.
- The financial aid office's decision about your dependency status is final and cannot be appealed to the U.S. Department of Education.