

Who Is My “Parent” When I Fill Out the FAFSA?

Maybe you know you’re considered a dependent student* by the FAFSA, and you’re supposed to put information about your parents on the application. But what if your parents are divorced? Remarried? What if you live with your sister? Here’s some information that might help:

- If your parents are living and married to each other, answer the questions about them.
- If your parents are living together and are not married but meet the criteria in your state for a common-law marriage, answer the questions about both of them. If your state does not consider them to be married, fill out the parental information as if they are divorced. (See below.)
- If your parent is widowed or single, answer the questions about that parent. If your widowed parent is remarried as of the day you sign the FAFSA, answer the questions about that parent and the person whom your parent married (your stepparent).
- If your parents are divorced or separated, answer the questions about the parent with whom you lived more during the past 12 months.
 - If you lived exactly six months with each parent, give answers about the parent who provided more financial support during the past 12 months or during the most recent year that you actually received support from a parent. If this parent is remarried as of today, answer the questions on the FAFSA about that parent and the person whom your parent married (your stepparent).
- The following people are not your parents unless they have adopted you: grandparents, foster parents, legal guardians, older brothers or sisters, and uncles or aunts.

EXCEPTION: The FAFSA 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 in these questions.

What if my parents don’t want to help me pay for college?

They don’t have to, but we do need their information to put together a picture of your family’s financial strength. This helps determine how much help the government can give you to pay for school.

What if my parents don’t want to provide their private information on the FAFSA?

Their information is safe with us. We recommend you fill out your FAFSA online, where your information is put into special code before it’s sent over the Internet to our processor. Also, we won’t share your FAFSA information with anyone except the schools you tell us you want to attend (so they can use the information to award financial aid to you) and a few federal government agencies (so they can check to be sure you’ve reported your information accurately).

What if I don’t live with my parents?

You still must answer the questions about them if you’re considered a dependent student.

What if I have no contact with my parents?

If you don’t know where your parents are, or you’ve left home due to an abusive situation, get in touch with the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend. The financial aid administrator will tell you what to do next. Don’t put this off or you might miss financial aid deadlines!

* To find out whether you are a dependent student, see “Am I Dependent or Independent?” at www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/pubs or call 1-800-4-FED-AID.

