

Special Populations: Tips for Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Questions on the 2010-11 FAFSA which may cause difficulty for wards of the court or foster youth are listed below. Question **numbers** refer to the paper FAFSA. **Sections** refer to the FAFSA on the Web (FOTW) Worksheet. Please note that some questions on the paper FAFSA do not appear on the FOTW Worksheet. Answering yes to any question in Step Three/Section Two means that you will be treated as an independent student and will not need to provide parental information on the FAFSA.

Question #45 Section 4

Free child care

Q: I am a single mom with one child and will get free day care for my child (from a grandmother, aunt, or free day care center) while I go to college. Does the value of this free child care have to be reported on the FAFSA?

A: No, this service is not income and the information is not collected on the FAFSA. However, note that you need to let your school know that you are receiving free dependent care; an allowance for dependent care may not be added to your cost of attendance.

Question #51 Section 2

“Do you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011?”

Q: I have a child who will be living with me and my income will be from TANF. Do I answer “yes” to Question #51? Are TANF or welfare benefits considered to be like earned income?

A: TANF benefits count as support that you provide to your child. You would answer “Yes” to this question as long as you provide more than half of the child’s support.

Question #53 Section 2

“At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?”

Q: I am a ward of the court but graduated from high school and then went to live with my mother for two months. Did I lose my independent status?

A: A student is considered to be independent if he or she is a ward of the court, or was a ward of the court at any time when the individual was age 13 or older. If your ward of the court status changed before you reached age 13, you may be considered dependent on your parent. In that case, you should talk about your situation with the financial aid administrator at your college.

Question #53 Section 2

“At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?”

Q: I am a dependent child of the court of my county. Is this the same as a “ward” of the court?

A: The term “ward” is used to mean “dependent” of the court. You are a ward of the court (regardless whether this status is determined by the county or state) if the court has assumed custody of you. You should have court ordered documents that designate you a ward of the court.

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**Question #54
Section 2**

“Are you or were you an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?”

**Question #55
Section 2**

“Are you or were you in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?”

**Question #56
Section 2**

“At any time on or after July 1, 2009, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless?”

Q: I am no longer under the court because my foster parents took legal guardianship of me a few years ago. However, my foster parents do not support me with their own financial resources. They still get a foster care check each month for me. How do I answer question #53?

A: If you were in foster care at any time when you were 13 or older, answer the question yes. If you are in legal guardianship, also answer Question 55 “Yes.”

Note: Neither legal guardians nor foster parents are considered parents when completing the FAFSA.

Q: I turned 18 and graduated, so my court case was closed. My college is saying I am no longer an independent student because I’m no longer a ward of the court. Am I considered dependent or independent?

A: You are considered to be independent if you were a ward of the court, **at any time** when you were age 13 or older. You should check “Yes” to this question if you were a ward of the court when you were age 13 or older.

Q: I was emancipated at age 15 but lived with my aunt and uncle during my last semester of high school. How should I complete the FAFSA?

A: Answer Question 54 “Yes” and complete the FAFSA as an independent student if you have a copy of a court order that you are an emancipated minor. The court must be located in your state of legal residence. If the court order is no longer in effect and you have not reached the age of majority for your state of legal residence, complete the FAFSA as a dependent student.

Q: My grandparents are my court-appointed, legal guardians. They have provided support for me all my life. How do I complete the FAFSA?

A: Answer Question 55 “Yes” and complete the FAFSA as an independent student if you have a copy of a court order that you are in a legal guardianship. The court must be located in your state of legal residence. If the court order is no longer in effect and you have not reached the age of majority for your state of legal residence, you must complete the FAFSA as a dependent student.

Q: I became homeless during my senior year in high school. Am I considered an independent student?

A: You are considered an independent student if you received a determination any time on or after July 1, 2009, that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless. The financial aid administrator at your college may require you to provide a copy of the determination or other documentation.

If you are not sure you have a determination but you believe you are an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or are an unaccompanied youth

providing your own living expenses who is at risk of being homeless, contact your school's homeless liaison for assistance. Contact your school's financial aid office for assistance if your school's homeless liaison did not make a determination. .

"Youth" means that you are 21 years of age or less or are still enrolled in high school as of the day you sign the FAFSA.

"Unaccompanied" means you are not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

"Homeless" means lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing, including living in shelters, motels, cars, and temporarily with other people because you have nowhere else to go.

Question #57 Section 2

"At any time on or after July 1, 2009, 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?"

Q: I lived in an emergency shelter last year. How do I complete the FAFSA?

A: Answer "Yes" to Question 57 if you received a determination any time on or after July 1, 2009, that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless. The financial aid administrator at your college may require you to provide a copy of the determination or other documentation.

If you are not sure you have a determination but you believe you are an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or are an unaccompanied youth providing your own living expenses who is at risk of being homeless, contact the director of the emergency shelter for assistance. Contact your school's financial aid office for assistance if the shelter director did not make a determination.

"Youth" means that you are 21 years of age or less or are still enrolled in high school as of the day you sign the FAFSA.

"Unaccompanied" means you are not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

"Homeless" means lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing, including living in shelters, motels, cars, and temporarily with other people because you have nowhere else to go.

Question #58 Section 2

"At any time on or after July 1, 2009, 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?"

Q: My mom died a few years ago and I have no contact with my dad. I am in a transitional housing program. Am I an independent student?

A: Answer "Yes" to Question 58 if you received a determination any time on or after July 1, 2009, that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or at risk of being homeless. The financial aid administrator at your college may require you to provide a copy of the determination or other documentation.

If you are not sure you have a determination but you believe you are an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or are an unaccompanied youth providing your own living expenses who is at risk of being homeless, contact the director of the transitional housing program for assistance. Contact your school's financial aid office for assistance if the director of the transitional housing program did not make a determination.

"Youth" means that you are 21 years of age or less or are still enrolled in high school as of the day you sign the FAFSA.

“Unaccompanied” means you are not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

“Homeless” means lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing, including living in shelters, motels, cars, and temporarily with other people because you have nowhere else to go.

Question #94

“How many people are in your household?”

Q: I live with my foster parents and their children. Are they my “family members?”

A: No. If you are considered independent (for example, because you are in foster care), and you have no dependent children of your own, you are a family of **one** (yourself).

Question #104

Signatures

Q: I have filled out this form as an independent student because I am a ward of the court. Do I need my father’s and/or mother’s signature(s)? I don’t live with them, but I see them sometimes.

A: No. Because of your status as a ward of the court, you are considered an independent applicant; parental signatures are not required.

Source: National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)
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