

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Filing Myths & Realities

There are many myths around submitting this important financial aid form. Below are some of the myths (and the realities) about the FAFSA form.

MYTH:

"I am in a legal guardianship, but my guardians cannot afford to send me to college. I don't want to ask them for their financial information, so I can't file a FAFSA."

REALITY: If you are in a legal guardianship (as determined by a court in your state) immediately before you reach the age of 18, you can file a FAFSA without any parental or guardian information. Just note, the financial aid administrator at your college may require you to provide additional information such as a copy of the court's decision.

MYTH: "I am currently living with my best friend's family, and have no contact with my biological father/mother. I am not in a legal guardianship. I won't be able to provide any parental financial information on the FAFSA, so I cannot file."

REALITY: If the reason you have no contact with your biological parent(s) falls under a special circumstance it could put you in a category called "unaccompanied homeless youth." As an unaccompanied homeless youth, you can file a FAFSA without parental information. Examples of special circumstances include:

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

For more information about the unaccompanied homeless youth designation, you can contact your McKinney-Vento School District Liaison or your college of interest's financial aid office.

MYTH:

"My parent(s) doesn't file taxes since they are on social security disability and I don't work. So I can't file a FAFSA since we have no tax information to provide."

REALITY: In this scenario, the parents are 'not required' to file taxes because their income is below the federal filing threshold. Therefore, the student can file the FAFSA and answer the question "have your parent(s) filed a federal tax return" with the option "not going to file." This answer will let the schools know that your parents did not file taxes for that year. The family may then be asked at a later date to provide a non-tax filer transcript to provide verification of their non-filing status. This document will allow the student to be eligible for all the aid for which they qualify.

MYTH:

"My parent hasn't been paying on their own student loans and is now in default. So the government won't give me aid if my parent is on my FAFSA, so I can't fill it out."

REALITY: You absolutely can still fill out a FAFSA and include your parent's financial information on the form. The two primary sources of aid available, a Pell Grant, and federal student loans, are not contingent on a parent's credit history, including student loan debt, bankruptcy or foreclosure history or low credit score.

NOTE: If your parent has a problem on their credit history (like examples listed above) they MAY be denied as a co-signer for additional loans including a Federal Parent PLUS Loan or a private student loan. But these are different than the aid a student can receive from the federal government by filing a FAFSA.

MYTH:

"My parents are divorced; and we have no contact with my other parent. They don't pay child support and haven't been in my life for years. I can't file a FAFSA since I don't have financial information from both of my biological parents."

REALITY: If your parents are divorced or separated and do not live together, you only need to include the financial information about the parent with whom you lived with more during the past 12 months. Just note, if the parent you live with most is remarried, their new spouse's financial information also needs to go on your FAFSA.

MYTH:

"I have a green card. I was told that I can't file for federal financial aid since I am not a citizen."

REALITY: As long as the student is a U.S. permanent resident with a Form I-551, I-151, or I-551C (Permanent Resident Card, Resident Alien Card, or Alien Registration Receipt Card), also known as a "green card" the student can file a FAFSA as a "eligible non-citizen".



Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Filing Myths & Realities

MYTH: "My parents say that since I am 18 years old, I am a legal adult. Because of my age, they don't want to provide their financial information on my FAFSA or help me pay for college. So I can't fill out a FAFSA."

REALITY: First, although you are 18 years old and a legal adult in your state, according to the Department of Education, you are a dependent student on the FAFSA until the age of 24. So you would need to include your parent(s) financial information on the FAFSA for it to be considered complete. Nevertheless, you can fill out a FAFSA without providing parental financial information, HOWEVER, doing so would make you eligible for less financial aid. If it helps, you could explain to your parent(s) that by putting their financial information on the FAFSA, they are in no way committing to helping you pay for college. Actually, they could get you access to more money to be able to help yourself pay for college.

MYTH: "My parents said that they did not make much money, and didn't file taxes. I don't want to get them in trouble by filing the FAFSA if they were supposed to file taxes. So I'm not going to fill out the FAFSA this year."

REALITY: Parents may not have needed to file taxes. The government has a specific threshold for filing taxes. If people earn below a certain amount, they would not be required to file a tax form. If your parents know that they did not need to file taxes, you can complete the FAFSA. When given the question, "have your parent(s) filed a federal tax return", choose the option "not going to file". Doing so will let the schools know that your parents did not file taxes for that year. Know that your family may be asked to provide a non-tax filer transcript at a later date. This form provides verification of their non-filing status and will allow you to be eligible for all the financial aid for which you qualify.

What You Will Need to File Your FAFSA

- Completed 2017 federal tax return (1040, 1040A, 1040EZ) and all W2 documents
- Social Security Numbers (SSNs), birth dates for parent(s) and student
- FSA IDs (username and password) for one parent and student (create these at fsaid.ed.gov)
- Balance of cash, savings, and checking accounts
- Balance of other non-retirement assets and second property equity information
- List of colleges/universities applied to (or planning to apply to) by the student
- Alien Registration Card (if appropriate)

You do not need to wait until you have been accepted for admission to apply for financial aid! Schedule your free 60-minute FAFSA appointment by calling the Center for College Planning (CCP) at 888.747.2382, x119.

