



Tip Sheet for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY)



Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and unaccompanied youth who are self-supporting and at risk of homelessness, face many challenges completing the FAFSA®. Under the Higher Education Act, these students are considered independent students, and do not need to include parental information on the FAFSA. [Guidance](#) from the U.S. Department of Education announced changes to financial aid processes for youth experiencing homelessness resulting from the FAFSA Simplification Act. These changes became effective with the 2023-24 FAFSA. This tip sheet is designed to help youth experiencing homelessness with some of the pressing questions they may face while filling out the FAFSA. For more information, see SchoolHouse Connection's FAFSA [page](#).

Question	Answer
1. How do I know if I meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting?	An unaccompanied homeless youth is a youth under the age of 24 who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and who meets the definition of homelessness outlined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act . An unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting is a youth under the age of 24 who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and is currently paying for their own living expenses, which includes paying for fixed, regular, and adequate housing. At risk of homelessness is 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.
2. I'm staying with friends temporarily because I don't have a safe or stable place to stay – do I meet the definition of homelessness?	Yes, view this page to read more about the different living situations covered under the definition of homelessness.
3. When would I have needed to experience homelessness to be considered a homeless youth on the FAFSA?	If one of the authorized entities described in question 6 below can provide a determination, you would have needed to experience homelessness on or after July 1st of the preceding award year. For example, if you are filling out the 2025-2026 FAFSA, you would have needed to experience homelessness on or after July 1, 2024. If a determination cannot be provided from one of the authorized entities, the financial aid administrator is required to make a determination based on current circumstances.
4. What if I am experiencing homelessness with my family?	If you are experiencing homelessness with your family, you are not unaccompanied. You will fill out the FAFSA as instructed and include parental information.
5. What if I'm unaccompanied and experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but still have some contact with my parents?	You can still be in contact with your parents and meet the above definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting. Contact with parents is not part of the legal definition of homelessness or unaccompanied.

Question	Answer
6. Who are all the authorized entities that can provide me with a homeless youth determination?	Authorized entities include school district homeless liaisons or their designee ; a director or designee of a director of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness; a director or designee of a director of a program funded under a TRIO or GEAR UP grant; and a financial aid administrator at the current institution or at another institution who made a determination during the same or prior award year.
7. What if my institution is asking for more documentation aside from the determination letter I provided?	If you are being asked for additional information, beyond the determination letter, you can share this federal guidance with the financial aid administrator stating that “if the student has received a documented determination from one of these authorities, the institution must not request additional documentation, proof, or statements unless it has conflicting information about the student’s status.”
8. What do I do if my financial aid administrator won’t accept my determination?	Financial aid administrators must accept determinations from the authorized entities described in question 6 above. Share this federal guidance with the financial aid administrator stating that “The HEA, as amended, provides that documentation from one of the above authorities is sufficient for establishing a student’s unaccompanied homeless youth status. Therefore, if the student has received a documented determination from one of these authorities, the institution must not request additional documentation, proof, or statements unless it has conflicting information about the student’s status.”
9. What do I do if I become homeless while in college?	If one of the authorized entities described in question 6 above are not able to provide a determination, the financial aid administrator is responsible for making a determination based on a written statement or documented interview with the student. Reach out to your financial aid administrator using the template here .
10. Do I need to document my unaccompanied homeless youth status every year?	If you were identified as homeless on the FAFSA the prior year, answer the homeless FAFSA question as “yes” and you just need to confirm that your situation has not changed. You do not need to provide a new determination nor should the institution require more.
11. What do I do if my institution is making me do something called a dependency override or provisional independent student status?	If you believe you meet the above definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or an unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting, reach out to the financial aid administrator and explain that you are requesting an unaccompanied homeless youth determination outlined by federal guidance here . SchoolHouse Connection created this template that financial aid administrators can use to provide determinations. Unaccompanied homeless youth or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting youth are separate and distinct processes from dependency overrides and provisional independent student status.
12. I was identified in high school as homeless and took a gap year. I’m still in the same living situation, how do I fill out the FAFSA now?	If you are still in touch with your school district liaison, reach out and see if they would write another letter for you and send it to your financial aid administrator and they must accept the determination. If you don’t have a letter or aren’t in touch with your liaison, the financial aid administrator is responsible for making the determination based on a written statement or a documented interview with the student. Reach out to the financial aid administrator using the following template here .

Question	Answer
13. How do I find out who my school district liaison is?	View this directory here . There is high turnover, so if the entry for the liaison in your school district is not up to date, you can also reach out to the state coordinator that is listed in your state.
14. How do I prepare for an interview with a financial aid administrator or write a letter documenting my situation?	See this resource here on how to prepare for an interview with a financial aid administrator. The focus of the interview/letter should be if your current circumstances meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied youth at risk of homelessness and self-supporting, on or after July 1st.
15. What are other resources for students experiencing homelessness?	Reach out to your institution to see if there is a homeless higher education liaison, basic needs center, or student support office that is designated to help support students. There may be additional resources like food pantries, emergency aid, or peer support group systems. Some states might have specific laws related to college students experiencing homelessness. Check out SchoolHouse Connection's Youth Connections resources , including the SHC Scholarship Program .