

Dependency Override Reference Tool

Situations that merit a dependency override include the following:

- an abusive family environment (e.g., sexual, physical, or mental abuse or other forms of domestic violence)
- abandonment by parents
- incarceration or institutionalization of both parents
- parents lacking the physical or mental capacity to raise the child
- parents whereabouts unknown or parents cannot be located
- parents hospitalized for an extended period
- an unsuitable household (e.g., child removed from the household and placed in foster care)
- married student's spouse dies or student gets divorced

Abandonment is the failure of the parent to provide financial support or to communicate with the child for a long time, generally understood to be a year or more. In custody cases this is a prerequisite for a court to deem the child abandoned by the parent and to order the parent's parental rights terminated. Abandonment can also refer to physical abandonment, where the child is left on a doorstep or delivered to a hospital. So there are two key elements to the definition of abandonment: (1) no contact for at least a year, and (2) no support for at least a year. (Note that if a parent abandons a child and later reenters the child's life, the courts would be very slow to restore parental rights, if at all. So if a student has had no contact with a parent for most of the student's life, recent attempts to reconcile do not prevent a dependency override on the grounds of abandonment.)

An abusive family environment is often difficult to detect, especially if the abuse is more emotional than physical. Signs of an abusive family environment include the following:

- Kicking children and/or a spouse out of the house.
- Violence, including physical abuse against the children or the spouse.
- Sexual abuse.
- Emotional abuse.
- Use of abusive language, including name-calling.
- Failure to properly clothe or feed the family.
- Attempts to commit suicide by one or more family members.
- One or more family members running away from home.
- Parents rejecting and ridiculing the child, controlling all outside contact with the child, keeping the child home from school for weeks or months, deliberate humiliation of the child in front of others.
- The child is abusive to others.

Emotional abuse is more difficult to spot, because there aren't overt physical signs. Some of the subtle signs include:

- Child has difficulty in forming relationships with others or in bonding with others.
- Child is extremely shy and lacks self-confidence.
- Child exhibits fatigue and listless.

- Child is routinely pessimistic.
- Self-injury.
- Self-deprecating remarks.
- Reluctant to go home.
- Constantly seeking attention.
- Bullying and hostile to others.
- Ridicules others.
- Repeated truancy and tardiness.
- Grades not consistent with child's academic ability.
- Engaging in self-abusive activities, including alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, prostitution, and criminal activities.

Occasionally a student will have been kicked out of the house upon reaching the age of majority. This is not uncommon when the student's parents are divorced and the student has an estranged relationship with the stepparent and the non-custodial parent is unwilling or unable to take in the student. Although the student's self-sufficiency is insufficient grounds for a dependency override, the financial aid administrator may be able to make a case for a dependency override on the grounds of abandonment.