

Emancipation

Emancipation allows a child to become legally independent from the child's parents before age 18. In return, the child must take responsibility for the child's life, including finances, housing, and healthcare. The rules for emancipation vary from state to state. In Wisconsin, a child becomes legally emancipated at the age of 18. However, an emancipated person still has to follow other age restrictions in the law. For example, in Wisconsin, a person can't drink until they are 21 years old.

In Wisconsin, there is **no** court procedure available to become emancipated. There are only two ways to become emancipated:

1. **Marriage.** If a child marries, the child is considered emancipated, but the child's parents must agree to the marriage first.
2. **Military.** If a child joins the military, the child is considered emancipated. Again, the parents must first agree to the military service.

For some children seeking emancipation, neither marriage nor the military will be good options. What are some alternatives?

- Child Protective Services: Children who are in unsafe or abusive households can contact Wisconsin Child Protective Services. They can find a safe place to live and provide support without requiring full legal independence. See our article on [Child Protective Services](#).
- Guardianship: Children who are 12 years old or older, can ask the court for a guardian. This means someone else, like a relative or trusted adult, would take care of the child instead of the parents, but a judge must first find that either or both parents are unable to provide that care.

Although emancipation is not legally allowed in Wisconsin except in the limited situations described above, there are some benefits and challenges of emancipation:

Benefits:

- The ability to sign contracts (e.g. lease agreements)
- The right to make medical decisions
- Control over finances

Challenges:

- Paying for housing, food, and other expenses
- Balancing work, school, and daily responsibilities
- Losing parental support and guidance

Sometimes children move out of a parent's home to live with a friend or other relative. This is not emancipation and the parent(s) still has all the same obligations and responsibilities for that child that would exist if the child were still living in the family home.

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