

research  
in practice

**A brief guide to...**  
*financial abuse*

Dartington

## What is...*financial abuse*?

Financial abuse is when a person (or people) steals from, controls or misuses another person's money or belongings. This is usually for their own personal gain, or to limit the person's independence. Examples include taking money or cash from a person's bank account or from their home, and/or taking or stealing items that have a significant value (sometimes referred to as 'assets'). These can include valuable possessions in a household such as furniture, jewellery, vehicles and property.

Financial abuse often involves one or more of the following:

- > **Putting pressure** on or making someone feel frightened about the consequences if they do not hand over their money, or control of their money. This can be carried out by a partner, carer, friend, relative or acquaintance.
- > **Stealing** from a person when 'looking after' their finances, often by someone in the role of being a carer or friend. Examples can include taking out benefits or income from an ATM machine on behalf of a person, or overcharging a person when going shopping or paying bills. This can take place with the person's consent, because they may not realise what is happening.

Other examples include:

- > **Identity fraud:** This involves tricking or 'scamming' a person to obtain money under their name. This may include benefits, loans and credit cards.
- > **Scamming:** This involves deceiving somebody into handing over their personal details for the purpose of identity fraud, or persuading somebody to part with money for a fabricated reason.



The amount that is taken from an individual as a result of financial abuse can vary significantly. It may be that a very valuable item, large sum of money or smaller, regular amounts of money are taken from them. Scamming and identity fraud tend to be carried out by strangers. However, stealing and the deliberate misuse of someone's money can often be done by someone in a position of trust, such as a friend, relative, partner or carer.

## Who...is at risk?

Financial abuse can happen to anyone. Some people may be more at risk of financial abuse. For example:

- > Older people.
- > People with learning disabilities.
- > People who experience poor mental or physical health.
- > People from minority ethnic communities.
- > People who are isolated.
- > People who are in debt.



## How does...financial abuse affect people?

Financial abuse can feel confusing or frightening, and impact on a person's mental health and wellbeing. People can experience a loss of confidence and self-esteem, and sometimes shame, that this has happened to them. This can impact on relationships with friends and family, and can lead to isolation and loneliness, or not taking part in social activities.

It may also result in financial hardship that means the victim has difficulty affording their living costs, and can take time to recover from.

## What should...you do if you think you or someone you know is a victim of financial abuse?

Sometimes people may not be aware of what is happening to them, or the extent of the abuse. They may also not want to report the abuse. Financial abuse rarely stops by itself.

If you think that you, or someone you know, is being financially abused there are a number of places that provide information and support. If you are unable to contact services by yourself, talk to someone you trust. This could be:

- > Your GP.
- > The police.
- > Your social worker, or any person working in health or social care.
- > Your local Adult Safeguarding Service. The number can usually be found on your local council's website.

Sometimes people may find it difficult to understand and make decisions about their money, for example if a person is living with dementia or has a learning disability. If you approach services for support they have a number of different ways that they can help you or the person affected.

If a person tells adult social care about abuse the council will usually work together with people and organisations to investigate it. Where abuse is happening they will try and stop it. You can find more information about safeguarding adults in the Research in Practice resource ***What is... safeguarding adults?***

## **How do...I know if things are working well?**

- > Services are there to help you get the support you need to feel safe and well.
- > You are told how different services and professionals can help, including what can and can't be done.
- > You feel confident about who you can trust and how your finances are managed in the future.
- > You understand what is happening and why, for example, your bank may need to temporarily freeze your account or send you new cards and PIN numbers.

## Practical advice

If you need help to contact adult social care or other services in the area you live in, ask someone you trust to help you.

If you think you or someone you know is being financially abused, tell someone. Even if you are not completely sure, it is always better to check. Services will investigate, and this could lead to preventing possible harm.

Ask questions if you don't understand what is happening, or why.

Financial abuse may have taken place even if the person being abused appears to have agreed to it.

You can contact your local council or Trading Standards if you have any more questions or concerns after reporting financial abuse.

Tell somebody if you need support because financial abuse has affected your health and wellbeing.

You do not have to give your name if you contact your local safeguarding team to tell them you think someone you know may be being financially abused.

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**Organisations that may be able to provide  
information and support:**

**Crimestoppers**

**[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)**

**Citizen's Advice**

**[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)**

**Action Fraud**

**[www.actionfraud.police.uk](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk)**

**National Domestic Abuse Helpline**

**0808 2000 247**

**The National Benefit Fraud Hotline**

**[www.gov.uk/national-benefit-fraud-hotline](http://www.gov.uk/national-benefit-fraud-hotline)**

**Trading standards** – to report a business that has  
scammed someone (via Citizen's advice)

**[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/  
report-to-trading-standards](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/report-to-trading-standards)**

**Your bank or building society**

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