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# Protecting those you love

A guide to identifying and avoiding  
elder financial abuse



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# It's a growing problem — and it can happen to anyone

It's easy to understand why elderly individuals are targets for financial abuse. They may have significant assets or equity in their homes and usually have a regular source of income such as Social Security or a pension. They also may be especially vulnerable due to isolation, cognitive decline, physical disability, or other health problems.

Victims often feel embarrassed or humiliated, incompetent, or fear further isolation or repercussions from abusers. For these reasons, elderly persons may suffer in silence and financial abuse crimes go unreported. It's important to raise awareness of the red flags surrounding this crime by talking with elderly loved ones and helping them understand they are not alone in dealing with financial abuse.

In this guide, we'll provide you with suggestions about how to protect yourself and the ones you love. We'll also give you resources to call if you are a victim of elder financial abuse or suspect someone who is.

## Did you know?

Consumers  
reported over  
**\$3.4 BN**

in elder fraud-related losses,  
a 30% increase from the  
year before.<sup>1</sup>

It is estimated  
that in up to  
**90%**

of elder financial exploitation  
cases, the abuser is a family  
member or trusted person.<sup>2</sup>

Reported elder fraud  
averages  
**\$18,246 in  
losses**  
per incident.<sup>3</sup>

1. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (consumerfinance.gov) *Data Spotlight: Suspicious Activity Reports on Elder Financial Exploitation* and AARP BankSafe Initiative: *Responding to the Pandemic-Era Uptick in Financial Exploitation*, October 4, 2022 (aarp.org).

2. According to National Adult Protective Services Association. 2018.

3. Federal Bureau of Investigation Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) *Elder Fraud Report 2021*.





## Taking steps to protect yourself

- Consider having these important documents and let a trusted person know where to find them:

Will

Durable Power of Attorney

Health Care Power of Attorney

Living Will

Revocable Living Trust

- Change account numbers, phone numbers, credit/debit card numbers, and passwords if your information is compromised.
- Review credit reports, account statements, and bills carefully for any unusual activity or charges.
- Send duplicate statements to a trusted person for review.



## Protecting others by knowing the warning signs

Pay attention to money management patterns

- Reluctance to discuss financial matters previously discussed as a matter of course
- Sudden, atypical, or unexplained withdrawals, wire transfers, or disbursements
- Unpaid utility or other bills; confusion about accounts, funds, and transactions
- Abrupt or unexplained changes in legal documents
- Excessive interest in finances of an older individual by family members or others
- Signatures that seem suspicious or forged

Be aware of social, behavioral, and physical changes

- Relationships with new best friends and “sweethearts”
- Isolation either deliberately by a caregiver or simply as a result of life changes
- Onset or worsening of illnesses and disabilities; decline in mental capabilities
- Changes in behavior, including fear, submissiveness, and withdrawal
- Disheveled appearance, forgetfulness, and adjustments to normal routine
- “Improper coaching” overheard or evident in conversations with an elderly person
- Missing possessions from the home or residence

### **For help**

If you suspect financial abuse is going on, don't be afraid to report it. See the resources available to you in the back of this guide.

# Watch out for these common stranger scams

Some financial scams are easy to identify, but others are not quite so easy to spot. Here are a few of the most common scams strangers may use to trick elderly individuals into giving up money, personal information, or property.

**Government scams (IRS/Medicare)** — Scammers pose as government officials requiring their victims to wire cash or use prepaid debit or gift cards to pay a bogus tax bill. Or they may provide sham Medicare services at makeshift mobile clinics in order to bill the insurance and pocket the money.

**Granny scam** — Fraudsters play to the emotions of grandparents by identifying themselves as grandchildren calling or emailing about an emergency situation. They may say, “I’ve been arrested and need money wired quickly,” or “I need cash cards for bail.”

**Prize and sweepstakes fraud** — Under the guise of a telemarketing call to notify the winner of a lottery or sweepstakes, the victim is told they must pay taxes on the jackpot via mail or wire before they can claim their prize.

**Sweetheart fraud** — With the false promise of love and companionship, elders are conned into trusting a new “friend” that they meet in person or through social media. The romantic partner then swindles them out of money and/or property before disappearing.

## And for when the abusers are known

Most older investors (68%) believe that a stranger would be the most likely perpetrator of financial exploitation against them.<sup>1</sup> The reality is very different — it is estimated that in up to 90% of elder financial exploitation cases, the abuse is a family member or trusted person.<sup>2</sup>

Typical types of financial abuse include:

- Using ATM cards and stealing checks to withdraw monies from the victim’s accounts
- In-home care providers charging for services; keeping change from errands, paying bills which don’t belong to the vulnerable adult, asking the vulnerable adult to sign falsified time sheets, spending their work time on the phone and not doing what they are paid to do

### Where to find help

Awareness of the latest scams is one of the best ways to protect against financial abuse. Stay up to date by visiting [aarp.org/money/scams-fraud](https://aarp.org/money/scams-fraud)

1. Source: 2018 Wells Fargo Elder Needs Survey

2. According to National Adult Protective Services Association, 2018.



## Our commitment

Helping you and your loved ones avoid or recover from financial abuse is integral to helping you succeed financially.

That's why we're committed to investing time, people and resources to help identify, intercept, and investigate incidents of suspected elder and vulnerable adult financial abuse.

Our team members are trained to help discover and address risk factors that may expose this abuse and resolve problems in a professional and confidential manner. We are dedicated to putting safeguards in place to help protect the assets our customers have worked hard to accumulate.

# What you can do

Here are four steps to help prevent elder financial abuse and exploitation:

- 1 Talk** — Don't wait for a crisis to address financial topics with children or aging parents. Hold a family meeting with loved ones to talk through plans. Respect the desire for elderly individuals to remain in control of their finances for as long as possible.
- 2 Write** — Make sure wills, trusts, powers of attorneys, and living wills are drafted and/or updated.
- 3 Engage** — Know your neighbors and connect frequently with family. Isolation is often a contributing factor to elder financial abuse. Familiarity, regular contact, and conversations will allow you to understand and speak up if something seems amiss.
- 4 Advocate** — Make sure to talk about the latest scams with family and friends. Become active locally to bring more attention to the elder financial abuse issue by volunteering at a community senior center or contact your local United Way agency.

## Resources

**Eldercare Locator:** [eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov)

Find local services and resources by ZIP code or city name. You can also access services toll-free at 1-800-677-1116.

**Alzheimer's association:** [alz.org](https://www.alz.org)

You'll find Know the 10 signs checklist as well as other resources to help diagnose and deal with the disease.

**Wells Fargo:** [wellsfargo.com/privacy-security/fraud/bank-scams](https://www.wellsfargo.com/privacy-security/fraud/bank-scams)

Learn more about the warning signs of financial fraud and how to spot common schemes.

**Department of Justice:** [justice.gov/elderjustice](https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice)

Utilize a library of tools and educational resources that help promote the safety of older Americans.

### Local law enforcement

Notify your local police and adult protective services when you see signs of elder financial abuse.

Wells Fargo has provided these links for your convenience but does not control or endorse the website and is not responsible for the content, links, privacy policy, or security policy of the websites.

[wellsfargo.com/privacy-security/fraud](https://www.wellsfargo.com/privacy-security/fraud)