

How to Handle the Scamming of Elderly Loved Ones

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Scamming elderly, disabled, and unsuspecting adults out of their money can happen anywhere — in their own homes, skilled nursing homes, and independent and assisted living centers. It only takes a little bit of a victim's personal, confidential information to end up in the wrong hands for a vulnerable individual to suffer immense financial loss. It can happen on the phone, over the internet, and in personal interactions — often with people the target knows and trusts.

While voluntary reporting to government agencies is highly encouraged to prevent and mitigate damage from elder abuse, there are also other ways to protect yourself and vulnerable loved ones from further harm.

What to do if you or an elderly loved one has been scammed

If you or someone you love has been scammed, consider immediately doing the following:

Stop all communications with the scammer. Don't respond to emails or voicemails; cease all personal contact as soon as possible.

Notify financial institutions holding active accounts. Contact banks, brokerage firms, and credit card companies to alert them to potential suspicious activity. They can monitor accounts and possibly cancel or reverse illegal transactions.

Change all passwords. If online or personal apps may have been compromised, change all passwords — and don't use the same combination of letters, numbers, and symbols more than once.

Contact the three major credit bureaus and freeze credit. These include Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax. In addition to freezing credit, the bureaus have procedures in place to limit the damage done by scammers who steal personal information from vulnerable victims.

Write down every detail pertaining to the encounter with the scammer. While it may be upsetting and scary, document every detail regarding interactions with the scammer. For example, write down a description of the scammer, the business or agency the scammer claimed to represent, a description of the scam, monetary amounts that changed hands, and the dates and times of contact. No detail is too small as any information will be helpful to authorities if you file a report.

How to Report Incidents of Elderly Financial Abuse

Call the National Elder Fraud Hotline at 833-FRAUD-11 or 833-372-8311 or visit:

[IdentifyTheft.gov](https://www.identifytheft.gov) (report identity theft and begin a recovery plan)

[ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.reportfraud.ftc.gov) (report a scam to the Federal Trade Commission and learn how to stop the fraud)

United States Postal Inspection Service (report mail theft and fraud)



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Report the incident to the proper law enforcement agencies. We said it before but it bears repeating – please report any fraudulent activity to the proper law enforcement agency. It's especially important to do this if a scammer is misrepresenting agencies such as the local police department, Internal Revenue Service, or Social Security Administration.

Handling emotions can be traumatic

Being victimized by a scam artist can be a traumatic experience at any age. Victims of elder fraud often feel ashamed and embarrassed they were so naïve and trusting. They often experience a range of emotions: anger, fear, stupidity, anxiety, hopelessness, withdrawal, depression, and grief over their financial loss.

Here are a few tips if an elderly loved one is having difficulty dealing with a scam incident:

- Be positive; do not chastise the victim. Instead, take a nonjudgmental approach to dealing with the emotions surrounding the situation.
- Provide opportunities for an elderly loved one to feel safe enough in their environment to talk about their feelings.
- Help them understand they did not do anything wrong — that scam artists make it their full-time job to con innocent people. Place blame on the scammer.
- If the victim is willing and able, allow them to help report and resolve the problem. (This will give a sense of empowerment and may lead to improved self-esteem.)
- Help the elderly person maintain a sense of "normalcy" and control, i.e., follow a daily routine, eat balanced meals, get enough sleep, enjoy hobbies, and spend time with family members and friends.
- Give the victim of the scam time to process the experience and come to terms with their emotions. Let them know they are not alone. Even if they don't want to talk about what happened, they can still find comfort in the company of others who care about them.

We can help

There are few things more frightening to older persons than having scammers take advantage of them. Having to cope with the emotional effects of elder financial fraud and protecting themselves from ongoing or future exploitation can be daunting. If you or a loved one are a victim of elderly financial abuse, Commerce Financial Advisors is here to help. We can help answer questions regarding the safety and security of affected accounts and explain next steps for protecting your family's assets. Call today for more information.



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Constance is the client care specialist for Commerce Trust. She provides personalized service and attention to clients as they navigate the decisions, situations and family dynamics that accompany key life stages. Constance specializes in elderly care advisory services, including long-term care facilities, home healthcare services, crisis management, and liaison services. Prior to joining Commerce Bank in 1998, Constance received bachelor and master of arts degrees in guidance counseling from Northeast Missouri State University. She also earned graduate certificates in marriage/family therapy from the Menninger Family Therapy Training Program and in gerontology from Lindenwood University. Constance is a Certified Senior Advisor (CSA), Certified Dementia Practitioner (CDP) and an Advanced Professional Certified Care Manager (CMC). She is a member of the Aging Life Care Association (ALCA), and as a trust officer, is held to the fiduciary standards of the Commerce Trust.



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