



Indigenous Women's  
*financial wellness*

# How to Spot and Stop Financial Abuse

A toolkit for Indigenous women and girls  
from First Nations Foundation



## Contents

There are several important things to understand about financial abuse, including **how to recognise the signs** and **where to go for help** if you're experiencing it.

You'll find the information you need to know in this booklet.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

If you're worried about your immediate safety, call 000.

**Djirra:** 1800 105 303

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14

**Aboriginal Legal Service:** 1800 733 233

For Elder abuse help call **Compass:** 1800 353 374

For debt help call the **National Debt**

**Helpline:** 1800 007 007

This resource has been developed by First Nations Foundation, a national Indigenous-led not-for-profit empowering individuals and communities to achieve financial prosperity. To find out more visit [firstnationsfoundation.org.au](http://firstnationsfoundation.org.au)

A decorative border made of teal wavy lines with small dots, framing the text.

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

It's often hard for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to recognise when they are experiencing financial abuse. In this section, we explain what exactly financial abuse is and how common it is.

## **2. Spotting the warning signs**

There are a few key ways to spot financial abuse. Knowing what they are may make it easier to recognise it if it's happening to you or a loved one.

## **3. Preparing the right documents**

Having the right information and documents can help to exit a financially abusive situation. This checklist may help.

## **4. Elder financial abuse**

In this section, we explain what to do if you're experiencing Elder financial abuse or know someone who is.

## **5. Getting help to recover financially**

If you've recently separated from your partner, there are a number of things you can do to make the financial transition easier. These include getting a secure bank account, finding support in the community and learning about ways to set yourself up in future.

## 1. WHAT IS FINANCIAL ABUSE?

**Financial abuse is when someone controls another person's access to money or resources. This may include dictating how money is spent or taking another person's money away from them.**

We often see financial abuse in intimate partnerships, but it can also occur in a number of different types of relationships, such as parent/child relationships, grandparent/child relationships or friendships. It can also happen in a broader family by several people who've learnt the behaviour from others.

It can be hard to recognise financial abuse because the abuser may be clever and use subtle forms of manipulation. For example, a husband may tell his wife he needs to look after the money because she is not very good at it.

As a form of family violence, financial abuse often occurs alongside emotional or physical abuse, but that's not always the case.

**These situations are not normal, they are not OK and help is available.**

**Here are just a few examples of financial abuse:**

- Someone may **'check' how much money their partner is spending**, such as looking in their wallet or at receipts and telling them off over what they've bought.
- One person may **control all of the household money** and only give their partner an allowance.
- A person may **gamble away** their family's money.
- Someone may tell another family member, such as an Elder, to **take out a loan for them**.
- A partner may **not contribute** towards the household at all.
- Someone may get you to **bail them out** of difficult financial situations.
- A person may **threaten to lie to government services** and claim you are cheating or misusing benefits.
- Someone may **interfere with your job** or not allow you to go to work or work in a field of work that you want to work in.

### How common is financial abuse?

Unfortunately, financial abuse is common in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Research shows more than **one in six women** experience financial abuse.<sup>1</sup>

However, it may be even more common than we think. We know that a lot of people who experience financial abuse don't report it, which makes it difficult to say how often it actually happens.

It's important to know that people from all walks of life experience financial abuse. Some victims are wealthy, while others aren't as well off. Similarly, it can happen to younger and older people; men and women and people from many different cultural backgrounds.

If you're experiencing financial abuse, it's not your fault! Remember, it can happen to anyone and help is always available.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.womenandmoney.org.au/what-is-financial-abuse/>

## 2. SPOTTING THE WARNING SIGNS

Financial abuse in Indigenous communities can take many different forms, which makes it tricky to spot. However, there are some common warning signs.

If you said 'yes' to any of these, you may be experiencing financial abuse.

If that's the case, you can contact one of the phone numbers on the contents page of this booklet.

1. Has someone **asked for a record**, such as receipts, showing how you spend your money?
2. Has someone told you to **leave your job** when you don't want to?
3. Has someone **taken your money** without your permission?
4. Has someone told you they need to **look after the family finances** because you're not good at it or can't be trusted?
5. Has someone given you an **allowance** (when you're an adult)?
6. Has someone **set a budget** for you without giving you equal input?
7. Has someone **gambled away money** that is supposed to be for you or your family?
8. Has someone threatened to **take away money** if you behave in a certain way?
9. Has someone **taken out a loan** in your name or spent money on your credit cards?
10. Has someone refused to give you **their share of money** for looking after children?

For Elders

11. Has someone been trying to get you to **change your Will**?
12. Has someone **gone into your bank account** or another money stash without your permission?
13. Has someone pressured you to **give them money**?
14. Has someone pressured you to **co-sign a loan** or a legal document?
15. Has someone **forged your signature**?

### 3. PREPARING THE RIGHT DOCUMENTS

If you're in a financially abusive relationship and are planning to leave it, one of the first steps people often take is preparing the right information and documents.

**IMPORTANT:** If you are experiencing family violence, you can seek personalised advice about how to prepare your exit. When you are in a safe place, you can call 1800 RESPECT. If it's an emergency, call 000.

#### Documents to prepare

##### Identity documents—this may include your:

- Driver's licence
- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Medicare card
- Other important cards including a Seniors, Centrelink or Pension card, if you have one.

##### Financial documents and cards:

- Bank, debit and credit cards
- Loan documents, if you own your property or car
- Rental agreements, if you rent your home
- Household rates, if you own your property
- Car registration papers
- Car insurance papers
- Home insurance documents
- Court orders or protection orders, if applicable
- Marriage documents
- Any letters to debt collection agencies
- Tax returns
- Superannuation fund information
- Sentimental items or valuables or photographs.

##### Other:

- Phone numbers of police, support services and friends
- A record of your phone messages
- A record of emails.

## 4. ELDER FINANCIAL ABUSE

### Elder abuse involves someone taking inappropriate control of an older person's money.

When we get older, we all become a bit more vulnerable. Often this means we have to rely on other people—sometimes to do things like pay our bills or buy our groceries. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, people take advantage of this vulnerability. For example, an Elder may give their child \$50 to buy groceries. Usually, the child would give their parent the right change. Abuse occurs if they keep the change without their parent knowing.

Like other forms of financial abuse, Elder abuse can be very distressing for the person involved. Sadly, research tells us that Elder abuse is often committed by someone who is trusted by the Elder.

It's important to know that **Elders have rights** and abuse can be dealt with.

#### Examples of Elder abuse:

1. **Taking money** from the bank accounts of an older person.
2. Asking an older person to **change their Will**.
3. **Taking jewellery** or other expensive items from an older person.
4. **Gaining power of attorney**—which is control of someone's financial decision making—when the older person is still capable of making their own decisions.
5. **Removing cash** from an older person's wallet.
6. Not **paying bills** of an older person when trusted to do so.
7. Not properly **caring for an older person**. For example, they may not have clean washing or proper meals when in someone else's care.

What to do if you think you're a victim of Elder abuse

As always, if you're in danger, call 000 immediately.

If you've identified the person responsible for the Elder abuse, **speak to a trusted friend or family member** for support.

Contact one of the support services for personalised help.

#### WHERE TO GET HELP

As well as the numbers on the contents page, here are some services specifically for elders.

**UnitingCare Elder Abuse Helpline: 1300 651 192**

A government service for people in aged care **My Aged Care: 1800 200 422**

This service can tell you more about your rights **Elder Rights Advocacy: 1800 700 600**



## 5. GETTING SUPPORT TO RECOVER FINANCIALLY

If you've left a financially abusive relationship, you may be feeling a whole bunch of different things. You may be relieved, you may be scared or you may be stressed. All of these feelings—and any others—are normal.

Financial abuse can continue after separation or divorce.

For some people, this may mean a partner:

- Not paying child support.
- Not paying their share of debts.
- Taking money from your shared bank accounts.
- Hiding things that belong to both of you.

**NOTE:** If you're struggling, you can always call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

### *There are a few steps you can take in your first weeks and months away from your partner to set yourself up financially.*

#### **Change your PIN number and passwords**

If you have your own bank account, starting fresh after financial abuse is often a time to change your bank account PIN number and email and phone passwords. For your banking, you can often do this through a phone call to your bank or by visiting a branch and showing them some identity documents.

#### **Setting up a secure bank account**

A safe bank account is a place you can store money to protect it from your ex-partner. Some people set up safe accounts before they leave a relationship. The idea is that the account is secure and hidden and can only be accessed by you. You can speak to a bank about setting up a safe account or can get more information by contacting a financial counsellor (1800 007 007) or 1800 RESPECT.

#### **Speak to a financial counsellor**

A financial counsellor can help you to come up with a plan for your specific situation. The great news is this is a **free service**. Call the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007. Despite the name, the helpline doesn't just look after debt. A counsellor can help you with a range of things, from starting a new bank account to setting up your super.

#### **Find your support network**

Having a group of friends and family members from your community you can talk to makes a huge difference. Choose a few people to call on when you're struggling. You may wish to assign a trusted buddy who you speak to about money matters.

#### **Learn more about money matters**

There's plenty of information out there specifically for First Nations people who want to learn more about money.

- First Nations Foundation has a **Women's Wellness Initiative** to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman establish good money habits.
- You can also access **My Money Dream** financial literacy training for free for 12 months.
- The **PENDA** app is available on Apple and Android. It's designed to help break the cycle of financial abuse. It features information about where to get help if you need it, including legal and financial assistance.
- Finally, the Foundation has also set up [tomorrowmoney.co/women](http://tomorrowmoney.co/women), which has lots of articles for women about different money topics.