

Where Can I Turn for Help?

If you think you may have been a victim of fraud or identity theft, seek help immediately. Your creditors are a good resource if you find yourself in trouble. They can work with you to help protect your account from fraud and work with you if you're struggling with your payments.

Here are some other places to turn for help:

Federal Trade Commission

Identity Theft Web site: www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft

Credit & Loans resources: www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/credit.shtm

1-877-382-4357

National Consumers League Fraud Center

www.fraud.org

National Association of Attorneys General

A state-by-state listing of attorneys general can be found at:

www.naag.org/attorneys_general.php

Equifax Fraud Assistance Department

www.equifax.com/answers/set-fraud-alerts/en_cp

1-800-525-6285

Experian Fraud Protection

www.experian.com/credit-education/identity-fraud-index.html

1-888-EXPERIAN (1-888-397-3742)

TransUnion Fraud Victim Assistance Department

www.transunion.com/corporate/personal/fraudIdentityTheft.page

1-800-680-7289



For More Information



**AFSA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION**

Brightening Your Financial Horizon

AFSA Education Foundation

919 18th Street, NW, Suite 300

Washington, DC 20006-5517

Phone: 888-400-7577

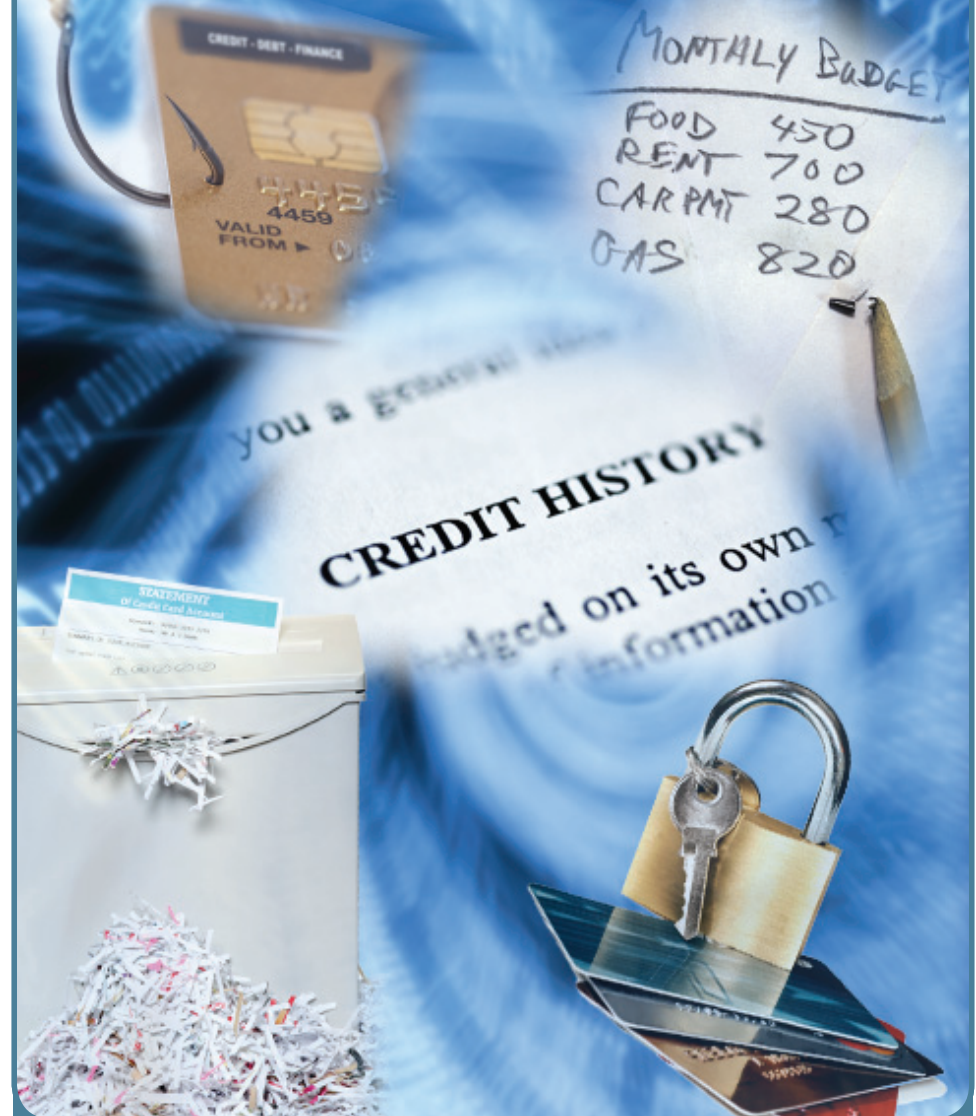
Web site: www.afsaef.org

E-mail: info@afsaef.org



Web site: www.moneyskill.org

Protecting Your Credit



www.afsaef.org

Protecting Your Credit

When it comes to credit use, being an educated consumer is ultimately the best way to avoid abusive and fraudulent practices. Who better to look out for you than you?

Whether you've been using credit for years or are just starting out on your own, this guide can help you look out for your own best interests when it comes to protecting your credit.

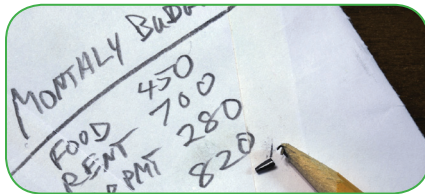


What warning signs should I watch out for?

Some fraudulent activity and scams are easier to detect than others. Knowing some common warning signs to look out for can help you protect yourself from those who are looking to take advantage of you.

Exhibit caution when:

- ✘ A sales representative tries to **pressure** you or talk you into extra products, services, or features.
- ✘ You receive **incomplete or conflicting information**, such as being told something different than what you've read.
- ✘ You receive or are asked to **sign** any document that has blank spaces.
- ✘ A sales representative seems **unwilling to answer** your questions or tends to talk around them without addressing your concerns.
- ✘ An advertisement or salesperson promises a **quick fix** to a problem, particularly when you have to pay a lot of money up front before receiving any help. Remember the old adage: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.



What can I do to protect myself financially?

Evaluate your current situation and determine what you can afford. The prevailing desire for instant gratification has led many people to get in over their heads financially. Moving from this mindset to a more thoughtful approach makes smart financial sense.

If you're thinking about applying for credit, make sure you can afford it first. You will be less likely to be taken advantage of and more likely to be satisfied with your purchase.

As a rule, be cautious and trust your instincts. If something doesn't seem right, take time to investigate before you make a financial commitment.

- ✘ **Research thoroughly.** When considering borrowing money, educate yourself on basic terms and available products and services. Give yourself ample time to review available options – even if it means delaying your purchase.

Protecting Your Credit

- ✘ **Set a budget and stick to it.** Calculate what you can – and can't – afford. Don't let extra fees and taxes make you exceed your budget. Get started with AFSAEF's budget calculator at www.afsaef.org/budgetplanner.cfm
- ✘ **Comparison shop for credit.** Look at a minimum of three offers from different financial providers to ensure you choose a product or service that best meets your individual needs.
- ✘ **Be selective about the companies with which you do business.** Ask people you trust for referrals.
- ✘ **Shop or conduct financial business on secure Web sites** that use encryption and authentication standards that protect the confidentiality of information transmitted over the Internet. Secure sites typically feature a security icon such as a locked padlock.
- ✘ **Check your monthly financial statements** against your receipts and for any unknown or suspicious transactions. **Contact** your lender promptly if you see anything unusual.
- ✘ **Check your credit report regularly.** Consider using a staggered approach on www.annualcreditreport.com, so you can check your credit report from one of the three major credit bureaus for free every four months.
- ✘ **Don't sign a contract until you have read it,** your questions have been answered, and all blank spaces have been filled in.
- ✘ **Don't allow yourself to be rushed or pressured** into making a decision. If you feel uncomfortable, leave.
- ✘ **Consider bringing a trusted friend or relative with you** to meet with a financial representative.
- ✘ **Don't disclose sensitive personal information** in emails or social media outlets, or if you haven't initiated the contact.
- ✘ **Watch out for "phishing" offers** – email or pop-up messages claiming to be from a business or organization you may deal with seeking personal and/or financial information.
- ✘ **Keep financial statements and credit cards in a secure location** out of sight.
- ✘ **Buy a shredder.** Use it to destroy any financial information that you are disposing.
- ✘ **Be cautious about co-signing.** You will be legally responsible for the account if it becomes delinquent.

