Scams

How do senior adults know when to get help? Do any of these scenarios sound familiar?

- I run out of money by the end of the month.
- I often regret or worry about financial decisions I’ve made.
- I have trouble paying bills because the bills are confusing.
- I don’t feel confident making big financial decisions alone.
- I don’t understand financial decisions that someone else is making for me.
- I give loans or gifts more than I can afford.
- My children or others are pressuring me to give them money or to change my will.
- Someone else is accessing my accounts or my money is disappearing.
- I can’t reach my advisor.

One way in which seniors can protect themselves from exploitation is to know how to handle potential scammers, whether they come to the door or call on the telephone. Here are a few examples of some responses you can use:

**The Grandchild Scam.** “I’ll discuss this with my financial advisor.” or “I need to call your parents before I can send you money. I can’t do this behind their backs.”

**Census Taker/IRS Agent Scam.** “Your question is not on the Census Form, and Federal law prohibits you from asking any questions not on the form.” “I’m going to call the field office to verify your identity.” “Please direct any questions to my CPA.”

**Creditor Scam.** “Please contact the executor of the estate.” “Please send proof of the debt to the address on file.”

**Charity Scam.** “I am not familiar with your charity. Please send a Form 990.” (They’ll know what that is.) “I have already planned my giving for the year. Please send a Form 990, and maybe I can give next year.”
Contractor Scam. “I have a regular contractor who does all my repairs.” “I’m going to get a second opinion. Do not start any work.” “I will need a detailed estimate of all work to be performed.”

Lottery Scam. Hang up the phone. Remember the old adage, “If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.”

National Do Not Call Registry. To have a telephone number placed on this registry, call 1-888-382-1222. The call must be placed from the number to be registered, and both land lines and cell phones may be placed on this list. Once a number is placed on this list, it is permanent. This list applies to commercial callers, but does not include charities, surveys or opinion polls, and political organizations. For calls received after the telephone number has been registered for 31 days, simply state, “This number is listed on the National Do Not Call Registry, and you are in violation of federal law.” If callers persist, they may be reported to the Federal Communications Commission, either by telephone at 1-888-835-5322 or by fax at 1-866-418-0232.

Elder investment fraud is securities fraud perpetrated against seniors and can take many forms. It can include unsuitable investments, fraudulent offerings, unregistered products, unlicensed advisers and brokers, and misappropriation or theft of funds. Why is elder investment fraud important to you? Your financial health affects your overall health. The quality of proper nutrition and healthcare are both affected by finances. Many aspects of normal aging and disease can contribute to vulnerability to fraud and exploitation. Changes in ability to make important decisions can leave you vulnerable to someone who may handle your affairs differently than you would. The population of older adults vulnerable to investment and financial fraud is large and growing larger. We are talking about the Baby Boomer Generation born between 1946 and 1964 – some 77.3 million Americans. We are all at risk.

How can you protect yourself? Don’t let yourself become a victim. Here’s how: Information is the best defense against fraud. Learning more about this issue will help to avoid situations that increase the risk of financial exploitation. Manage loneliness and social isolation. Interaction with others helps to retard the decline of mental faculties. Good health habits help to maximize physical independence. Reach out to someone you trust. Here are some resources for seniors to use:
**National Center on Elder Abuse** – works with state and local partners to ensure that older Americans live with dignity and without abuse.
1-800-677-1116  [www.nceea.aoa.gov](http://www.nceea.aoa.gov)

**United Way** – connects callers to information about available health and human services.
2 – 1 – 1  [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)

**Adult Protective Services** – protects older adults from abuse and exploitation through investigation and intervention.
[www.apsnetwork.org](http://www.apsnetwork.org)

**North American Securities Administrators Association** – the association of state securities regulators responsible for grass-roots investor protection.
[www.nasaa.org](http://www.nasaa.org)

**Investor Protection Trust** – works to provide objective investor education needed to make investment decisions.
[www.investorprotection.org](http://www.investorprotection.org)