



Money Problems with your Partner



INFORMATION
BOOKLET

1300 134 130 www.wire.org.au


WIRE

This information booklet has been produced with funding generously donated by Australian Unity.

We acknowledge the First Nations people as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

WIRE is a service for women, nonbinary and gender-diverse people.

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Introduction

You've probably picked up this booklet on money problems with your partner because you are concerned about your money situation. We hope that the information in the following pages supports you as you make decisions about how to respond to these events in your life.

Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is designed to support women, nonbinary and gender-diverse people experiencing money problems — and financial abuse — and the network of people supporting them. It assumes you are still with your partner or that your finances are still interconnected.

You are resilient and strong

We know that people in circumstances like yours are already doing many things every day to cope with your situation.

People do not experience financial abuse because of poor money skills; it is because one person has made a decision to exert financial and other power over someone else.

There's lots of information in this booklet, but you don't need to read it all at once. The information in this book might make you realise for the first time that what you're experiencing is actually financial abuse.

Using this booklet

Most of this booklet covers issues of financial abuse. The booklet is divided into sections, covering the definition of financial abuse, steps you can take to untangle your finances from an abusive partner and ways to find your way back to financial confidence. In each section there are contact details for relevant services, but there is also a list at the back of the booklet for easy reference.

Here are some other issues you might like to consider:

1. Are the money problems I'm experiencing actually part of a pattern of financial abuse? Or are they related to a lack of income or other issues in my life?
2. Is it safe for you to have this book at home with you? If not, consider leaving it at a friend's place. That could also be a good opportunity to have a discussion with your friend.

- 3.** Are there circumstances in your life that mean some of the suggestions in the booklet wouldn't be as simple for you as it sounds on paper? Attitudes about money and gender are pervasive throughout all cultures, and you might experience a lot of pressure to conform to these expectations, such as letting your husband make all the decisions about money in your family. It's okay to ask for help as you move through the steps suggested in this booklet.

About WIRE

WIRE is a Victorian organisation with a vision of a just society where all people can thrive. We provide information, resources, support and referrals for women, nonbinary and gender-diverse Victorians on a variety of issues.

We provide support through a Telephone Support Line, by email and online, as well as face-to-face at our Walk-in Centre located in inner Melbourne. We also deliver a range of programs and services including job coaching, employment workshops, financial and legal clinic, lunch-time clubs and activities for those

experiencing isolation and homelessness.

We undertake projects and provide education and resources to individuals, organisations and the community to build capacity and capability to counter gender bias, discrimination and family violence. This includes training and programs focused on increasing women's financial capability, addressing family violence, dealing with difficult calls and working more effectively with women.

We are a small organisation but our impact ripples throughout Victoria. With more than 60 active volunteers and 22 staff we provide services to Victorians that changes lives. We are proud of who we are, the service we provide and what we have achieved.

Acknowledgements

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What is financial abuse?

Financial abuse is a form of family violence. It can include withholding money, controlling all the household spending or refusing to include you in financial decisions. Financial abuse can happen to anyone.

“When we got married I had some savings, a job and a car. Now, the marriage is over and I’ve got nothing.”

Sound familiar?

Many people do not have access to finances in their relationship. If the relationship breaks down, they often find themselves without any money, or may not even know how much money they are entitled to.

What defines financial abuse?

The law in Victoria states that financial abuse is a form of family violence. Family violence is when one person uses power and control over another. Family violence is a repeated pattern of behaviour, and can occur between partners or other family members. Many people think of family violence as either physical injury or emotional abuse. However, **withholding money, controlling the household spending or refusing to include you in**

We use the term **‘victim-survivor’** when we talk about people with lived experience of violence. We use this term to acknowledge that although people are victims of violence, they are also actively engaged in managing their safety by the use of various coping mechanisms and strategies.

We talk about a **‘person using violence’** when we are referring to the person who uses their power and control to inflict the violence, whether it be emotional, physical, sexual or financial violence or a combination of these.

financial decisions can be defined as family violence. Financial abuse can be present with other forms of abuse, like physical or emotional abuse, but can also be present without these other behaviours.

WHAT DOES FINANCIAL ABUSE LOOK LIKE?

Controlling a family member's money:

- » Taking control of someone else's finances (e.g. being in charge of all the household income and paying the other person an allowance)
- » Controlling how all of the household income is spent
- » Forcing a family member to claim social security benefits like Centrelink
- » Making a family member be the guarantor on a loan or taking out a loan in their name
- » Making a family member take out a second credit card
- » Forcing a family member to work in a family business without being paid
- » Filing fraudulent insurance claims
- » Forging a family member's signature on financial documents
- » Taking money out of a family member's pension
- » Selling a family member's possessions without permission
- » Misusing an Enduring Power of Attorney
- » Forcing a family member to change their Will

Stopping a family member from earning their own money:

- » Stopping a family member from getting a job or going to work
- » Stopping a family member from going to work or important meetings by keeping them up all night or physically hurting them
- » Stopping a family member from studying
- » Stalking or harassing a family member's colleagues

Limiting a family member's access to money:

- » Not giving a family member access to bank accounts
- » Denying a family member access to money so they can't afford basic expenses like food or medicine
- » Destroying, damaging or stealing property
- » Racking up debt on shared accounts or joint credit cards
- » Withholding financial support like child support payments
- » Refusing to work or contribute anything to the household income
- » Gambling away a family member's money or shared money



2 Who experiences financial abuse?

Anyone can experience financial abuse. It can occur no matter your age, where you live, your occupation, your abilities or disabilities, your sexuality, your gender, your religion, your ethnicity, your skin colour, your residential status, your education, your social class, whether you live with your partner, whether you have children or whether you are in a monogamous relationship, have more than one partner or if you are no longer in a relationship.

Financial abuse can also occur in other family relationships. This can be between parents and children, between relatives or in any family-like relationship such as with carers or housemates. Although it can happen to anyone, like other forms of family violence, **the vast majority of violence is perpetrated by men against women.**

Elder abuse

Financial abuse of an older person is also a form of family violence called elder abuse. It is most commonly perpetrated by the older person's adult child or carer and can occur with or without other forms of abuse. Financial abuse, along with emotional abuse, is one of the most common forms of family violence perpetrated against older people, with both forms of abuse often co-existing.

Women, non-binary and gender diverse people from all kinds of circumstances and backgrounds experience financial abuse.

Many people feel responsible for the financial abuse they have experienced. This is often what the person causing harm has told them.

It is important to know that financial abuse is a choice made by someone who uses power and control against you. It can happen to anyone, regardless of your financial ability or knowledge.

You are not to blame. Whatever your circumstances, support and resources are available to help you regain control of your finances.

Dowry-related violence

Dowry is giving of money or goods to a bridegroom or his family in exchange for the promise of marriage. In some African communities, dowry is practised as payment to the bride's family from the groom. It is a deep-rooted practice in some South Asian cultures, although it varies greatly across different groups and is by no means uniform. In the Indian context, dowries likely originated as a woman's inheritance. Some women still view their dowry in this way.

In more recent times however, dowries sometimes began to be transferred directly to the groom or his family, leading to an increased risk of emotional, physical and financial abuse of women.

Whether paid from bride to groom or vice versa, the dowry practice maintains gender inequality. Victorian Law now includes forced marriage and dowry-related abuse in the legal definition of family violence.

Realities of 'relationship debt'

Sometimes the debts you are left with due to financial abuse are referred to as 'sexually transmitted debt' or 'relationship debt'. **Relationship debt is common and serious – it happens when you have to pay your partner's, or ex-partner's, debts.** Your partner might have forced or tricked you into signing a loan contract as a co-borrower or guarantor, or signing a mortgage so they could obtain a loan.

The reality is that you may be held responsible for these debts. If your name is on the contract, then as a co-borrower you are responsible for repaying the loan. If you have more assets or earnings than your partner, or you are easier to find, you may have companies telling you that you have to repay the debt. You may even find yourself solely responsible for a debt that you know nothing about. It is important to get assistance as as soon possible – it may be possible to have some or all of these debts waived or transferred to the person who caused the debts.



CONTACT FOR HELP

If you are experiencing relationship debt, you can call the National Debt helpline for free and confidential advice from professional financial counsellors.

- » Call 1800 007 007
- » Visit the National Debt Helpline website (www.ndh.org.au)

3 How did I get here?



TRUST IN A RELATIONSHIP

“I loved him and trusted him with our money. Now, I’m left with all his debts.”

In a relationship where you are in love, you may find it easy to trust your partner with all your money matters. It can also be challenging to question your partner about money as you may feel you are questioning their love.

MYTH: Handing over all responsibility and control of the household finances is a way of showing your partner trust, respect, love and commitment.

IN REALITY: Shared trust, respect, love and commitment in a relationship are reflected in having honest and equal power in all aspects of the relationship, including finances. If your partner truly trusts, respects and loves you, you should be able to have a choice about money matters and be part of the decision-making process.

INFLUENCE OF YOUR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Your family background and beliefs often shape your approach to money and might affect your confidence in managing your finances.

- » In your family, women might be excluded from financial matters and discouraged from managing money.
- » Your beliefs might lead you to think that money is a private matter that is not discussed publicly, so you might have no one to talk to.
- » Socially, there are lots of signals, like jokes and stereotypes, that lead you to think that it is acceptable for your partner to use money to control you.

Controlling behaviour regarding money in relationships is prevalent across all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. The language used to justify financial control of women may vary according to your culture, religion or class, but no group is immune to family violence and coercive control.

MYTH: Men are heads of the household and are better at finances than women.

IN REALITY: Lots of women have terrific money skills, and everyone has a right to learn about managing their finances. Women are great managers of household budgets and everyone has a right to know about money.

There are a variety of **intersecting issues that mean people from some communities have a higher risk of experiencing financial abuse** — it is more likely that women will experience family violence than men, for example and then more likely again if you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, a person with disabilities or a transgender, nonbinary or gender-diverse person. You might also experience discrimination from a bank or an employer. This is because patriarchy, racism, ableism and transphobia compound your experience of marginalisation, not because of anything you have done.

LOSING YOUR CONFIDENCE WITH MONEY

“I’m so scared of dealing with money I don’t even want to think about it.”

When someone has limited your access to money or told you that you’re not good with money, it can be really easy to lose confidence. It can also feel overwhelming, and you may find it hard to take the first step. Many people in similar situations feel this way. Unfortunately, if you don’t do anything, it can make things hard for you and your loved ones in the long run.

If you are concerned that you might not have money management skills, think back to when you have successfully managed money in the past. A good example might be when you worked out the household budget or paid rent and bills.

WIRE research has shown that financial decision making and money confidence can return.



CONTACT FOR SUPPORT

You can call WIRE on 1300 134 130 for support about financial and legal issues any time from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

WHEN THE PENNY DROPS

It can be hard to recognise financial abuse in a relationship. Often people know something is wrong but they don't have a name for it. However, something might tip you over the edge — receiving another bill you weren't expecting, discovering your partner's hidden assets, or reading an article.

You suddenly realise that you've been financially abused, and you might feel

betrayed, confused or unsure about what to do. When you realise the extent of your loss due to the abuse, you might feel angry and determined to get your share back. Navigating the legal and child support systems in Victoria can be frustrating, challenging and drawn out over a long period of time.

The next section is designed to start you on the path to recovery.



Getting back control of your money

The following are some steps you can take towards untangling your finances from your partner's and securing your future.

UNTANGLE YOUR MONEY FROM YOUR PARTNER'S

Separating your finances from your partner's is one way to protect your financial safety. This will look different for everyone depending on your situation but you are the best judge of what will be safe for you.

These steps are designed to prevent your ex from accruing more debts in your name or continuing the financial abuse.

Steps to safety

If you are thinking of leaving your partner, read WIRE's *Family Violence* information booklet which has information on safety planning. Leaving an abusive relationship can be a dangerous time and abuse may escalate. It is important that you consider all aspects of your and your children's safety as you prepare to leave. Below is specific information on financial safety planning.

Start by gathering your important documents — see the checklist on page 17–18. Then you're ready to take action.

1. Talk to your bank and explain the situation to them. Most banks have a hardship team that can help if you're experiencing financial difficulty, including family violence. You can call your bank or visit their website to find out more about how they can help you. Ask to speak directly to the hardship team so you don't have to repeat your story to multiple people. Your bank may be able to help you make some of the following changes.

» **Open your own account.**

It's important to have somewhere to put your money that the person using violence can't access. For some people, it is important that the person using violence doesn't know about this account. This might be with the bank you're already with, or with a different bank all together. You could use this account to receive your pay, Centrelink payments or for savings as you keep working towards your safety.

» **Freeze joint bank accounts and credit cards.** Make sure you have some money in your own account before you do this because once the

account is frozen, you'll no longer be able to access the money. Freeze all joint bank accounts you have with your ex, which will prevent them from draining the account(s). Cancel any joint credit cards you have, or second cards in your partner's name so they can't rack up more debts.

» **Protect your mortgage.** If your mortgage has a redraw facility or line of credit, change the terms so both signatures (yours and your partner's) are needed to withdraw money.

2. Assess your online safety. It is possible that your ex might be monitoring your smartphone or tablet without you knowing so it's a good idea to do this even if you don't think they know your passwords.

» Consider changing the PINs, passwords and security questions for all your mobile phone, bank and credit card accounts, online shopping accounts, email and social media accounts. If you're worried that changing these PINs, passwords and security questions might tip off the person using violence, there are other measure you could try below.

» Use a computer or smartphone that your ex-partner cannot access to

make online financial transactions, such as at a library or friend/family relation's house. You can also visit **WIRE's Walk-in Centre** during our opening hours (9.30am–4.30pm weekdays) to freely access one of our Internet-enabled computers.

- » For more tips and details on online safety, head to **Technology Safety Australia's** Women's Technology Safety & Privacy Toolkit (techsafety.org.au/resources/resources-women/).

3. Change your contact details. Get a new mailing address (PO box, friend or family member's address) that only you can access. **Australia Post** provides free mail redirection for family violence survivors (auspost.com.au/receiving/manage-your-mail/redirect-hold-mail/redirect-mail/free-mail-redirection-and-po-boxes). As part of this service Australia Post will send a letter to your old address to confirm that you are aware of, and authorise, the redirection of your mail. It will not disclose the new address, but if this is a safety concern for you don't use this service.

4. If you're renting, change the lease. If you have moved out, call a service like Safe Steps or Justice Connect to see if it is in your best interest to contact your real estate agent to have

your name removed from the lease. Removing your name may mean you will not be held responsible for any arrears or damage to the property but if you have left the property and wish to return later, removing your name from the lease may be an issue. If your ex has moved out, have them removed from the lease. If you need help with issues related to renting you can contact the **Tenants Union** (www.tenantsvic.org.au/) for help and advice.

5. Talk to your utility company.

Take your name off utilities if you are no longer at the property, so that you won't be held responsible for any unpaid bills. **Utility companies also have hardship programs and may be able to help if you're unable to pay your bills.** You have a right to their support if you're struggling but you or a financial counsellor will need to let them know what's going on.

Other considerations...

- » Speak to a **financial counsellor** about any debts or joint assets such as cars you may have with your partner, so that you can make informed decisions regarding your next steps.
- » Ask a **Centrelink social worker** to help you work through the financial

issues of separation, including how you or your partner should pay **child support** (see page 19).

- » **Seek legal advice** through a **Community Legal Centre, Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help phone line** or a private lawyer before you transfer ownership of vehicles, or change wills and insurance documents (see the Appendix on pages 27–31 for contact information).
- » **Transfer ownership and registration of vehicles** to either yourself or your partner, so that you are only responsible for your own vehicle.
- » **Consider speaking to an accountant** about your finances. Make sure the person is someone independent and doesn't know the person who has been using violence.
- » Alter the names and scope of the cover for your **insurance** – home insurance, such as building and

contents insurance, and any other car/health/life insurances.

- » **Make or change your Will.** Nominate a guardian for your children if your partner isn't the parent or guardian. **Cancel any Powers of Attorney** that nominate your partner, and nominate another person you trust. **WIRE** occasionally runs a clinic for women, nonbinary and gender diverse people seeking assistance with changing their will or power of attorney – call us on 1300 134 130 for more details.
- » **Visit a tax agent** or contact the **Australian Taxation Office** on 13 26 81 or via the ATO website (www.ato.gov.au) to find out how separation will affect the amount of tax you pay, or whether you are eligible for a refund. Also make sure that any tax returns are paid into an account in your name only.

GET YOUR OWN CREDIT REPORT

A credit report provides your credit history including any loans, credit cards or bad debts you have had, or whether you have been declared bankrupt or insolvent. It will include debts in your name that you might not be aware of. Creditors like banks use this to determine whether you will be able to repay your debts when you apply for a loan or credit card. **You are entitled to a free copy of your credit report every year.**

A bank or utility will often arrange for a credit report based on your personal details including your driver's licence, address and employment status, and they might make decisions based on the contents of it without telling you what was in the report.

To find out more about getting a copy of your credit report, visit the website of the **Office of the Australian Information Commissioner** (www.oaic.gov.au) or the **Money Smart** website (www.moneysmart.gov.au/borrowing-and-credit/borrowing-basics/credit-scores).

If you have a bad credit report

If you have a bad credit report because of your partner's debts, it is because you are still being seen as responsible for those debts.

You can contact the **National Debt Helpline** (ndh.org.au/) on 1800 007 007 or speak to a financial counsellor in your area to look at your options, such as restructuring your loans, negotiating debt repayments with banks, utilities and other creditors, or considering bankruptcy as an option.

Financial counselling is a free service. To find a financial counsellor visit the **Financial Counselling Australia** website (www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au).

CONTACT FOR HELP

You can also apply for a copy of your credit report by contacting a national credit reporting agency. You can find one listed here:

- » moneysmart.gov.au/managing-debt/credit-scores-and-credit-reports

Gathering your important documents

If you have to leave your home, make sure you take your personal documents with you – particularly, three forms of identification. The following is a checklist of financial and legal documents you might need.

Financial records:

- Bank statements from all accounts
- Credit card statements
- Cheque books, bank cards and credit cards
- Mortgage applications and repayment records
- Records of any loans and repayments
- Any correspondence with debt collection agencies
- Payslips
- Record of other work benefits (such as bonuses or fringe benefits)
- Receipts for other income
- Tax returns and refund statements
- Statements from superannuation accounts
- Documentation of Centrelink or childcare benefits

Legal documents:

- Birth certificates
- Driver's license
- Marriage certificate
- Passports
- Medicare card
- Health care card
- Wills
- Prenuptial agreements or binding financial agreements
- Records of any pending legal actions
- Immigration paperwork
- Any protection orders

Business documents:

- Business financial statements
- Records of business partnerships
- Business tax records
- Details of business assets

Remember: It is important to plan ahead. Store originals of all important documents in a secure

place, such as a bank deposit box. Keep copies of all these documents in another safe place, such as with a friend you trust. You can also scan copies of these documents and keep the files online so you can access them at any time.

Depending on your circumstances, you may need to send documents to a friend a few at a time to avoid raising suspicion.

WIRE's **My Money Kit** can help you have financial conversations and organise your money information.

Expense documents:

- Documents and receipts related to household spending
- Utilities bills
- Education and childcare expenses
- Health and medical expenses
- Insurances (health, life, car, house and home contents)
- Clothing receipts
- Charity donations
- Transport costs (such as petrol and public transport)

Property documents:

- Title documents and mortgage agreements
- Rental lease agreements and payment records
- Original purchase documents of any significant items
- Photos of items and furnishings in the home
- List of collectibles (such as artwork or jewellery)
- Vehicle registrations and ownership documents

CONTACT FOR HELP

If it is not safe for you to collect these documents, speak to a financial counsellor on how you can get copies.

To find a financial counsellor, visit the Financial Counselling Australia website:

financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au



5 Getting child support and Centrelink assistance

You may be eligible for assistance from Centrelink, or a higher rate of Centrelink payments, and child support payments if you have separated from your partner.

Updating your details

You must contact Centrelink to update your details within 14 days of any change (such as when you have separated from your partner and/or have changed address) to prevent any potential overpayment or underpayment. You can also enquire about your eligibility for income support payments as a survivor of financial abuse or if you have children under 8 years of age.

You might also be eligible for a crisis payment if you are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of family violence (www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/crisis-payment). You must complete the form within 7 days.

Applying for child support

You may also need to contact the Child Support Agency within 13 weeks to apply for child support (www.humanservices.gov.au).

Unfortunately, some people using violence continue abusing victim-survivors financially even after separation by manipulating and abusing the child support system and the family court.

Some things your partner or ex-partner might do to avoid or minimise payment:

- » Stop work or leave their job
- » Declare bankruptcy to avoid payment
- » Make their income and bank balance look less than it actually is (see the section on 'Financial abuse after separation' on page 22)

CONTACT

Call the Centrelink 'Families' Line (13 61 50) and you'll be referred to a Family Assistance Officer who will be able to give you further advice on the actions you need to take in your situation.



Getting legal advice

CHOOSING A LAWYER

Not all lawyers are experienced with family violence or understand its ongoing impact on a victim-survivor's ability to move on with their lives. **It's important to find a lawyer who is familiar with the tactics that can be used to prevent you from getting your fair share of the financial assets in your relationship.**

Questions to ask

Some questions about financial abuse that you can ask when choosing a suitable lawyer:

- » How can you protect me financially if my ex-partner tries to drive up my legal costs?
- » I have experienced financial abuse in my relationship. How will this be factored into my case and the property settlement?
- » My ex-partner might dispose of our assets, such as funds in the bank account or try to sell our house. What can I do?
- » I am in immediate financial need. What interim orders can you get to help me?

CONTACT

Community Legal Centres and Victoria Legal Aid (www.legalaid.vic.gov.au) may be able to assist you, though often they have limited capacity and may be unable to help with property settlement. In this case, you may need to talk to a private lawyer.

What is an interim spousal maintenance order?

An interim spousal maintenance order is a payment from your ex-partner to support you if you cannot meet your own reasonable expenses from your personal income or assets, based on establishing your financial need and your ex-partner's capacity to pay. You can be married or de facto. This is different from an interim property order, where the Court can order that some of your legal costs can be taken out of the eventual property settlement before the matter is finally settled. See www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/family-law-matters/property-and-finance/maintenance/

DEALING WITH THE FAMILY LAW COURTS

The more prepared you are for court, the better – but you don't have to do it alone. There are a number of ways you can get support during your case.

Be prepared

Some ways you can prepare yourself for the Family Law Courts:

- » Speak to your lawyer
- » Get all your case documents ready and find out as much as you can about the court process prior to your court hearing. Visit the **Family Law Courts** website (www.familycourt.gov.au) so you know what to expect.
- » Tell your family and friends what you are going through and seek their emotional support and understanding throughout this potentially long process. You might also seek help from a social worker or counsellor.
- » Recognise that the court process may take a long time to resolve so pace yourself. Take time out to think about and do other things that help you feel good.
- » Talk to other people who have been through similar experiences.
- » The role of the Family Law Courts is to interpret and apply the law. Judges' decisions are determined

by legislation. This may mean some court decisions may seem unfair or insensitive to your situation. If possible, seek independent legal advice or talk to a financial counsellor about what is happening, what your options are and what further action you can take.

Court Network

Court Network is a free, non-legal community service provided by volunteers for all court users – victims, witnesses, accused persons, family, and friends.. Court Network can provide support workers to be present with you during your court appearance. Call 1800 571 239 or visit Telephone Service Hours: 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM (Monday to Friday, AEST) www.courtnetwork.com.au.

Unfortunately, some people use the legal system to inflict further financial abuse. Should your partner have the means, you might be repeatedly taken back to court over an extended period. That can be a huge drain on your time, energy and money. It is important that you try and look after your emotional and mental wellbeing.

7 Financial abuse after separation



Sadly, financial abuse often continues after separation through hiding money, or using the child support system and family court.

Hiding money

Even after the relationship has ended, your ex-partner may hide money from you by:

- » Depositing money in trusts or your children's accounts which you have no control over
- » Manipulating joint Self-Managed Retirement Funds
- » Drawing money on a redraw mortgage
- » Declaring bankruptcy to avoid payment
- » Minimising their income by deferring salary or bonuses until after settlement
- » Minimising their bank account balance by 'lending' money to friends, overpaying creditors (credit cards, tax, etc.) or buying expensive items that can be sold later
- » Stockpiling cash

Continuing abuse

Your ex-partner might continue to abuse you or make it hard for you to get your fair share of the assets by:

- » Manipulating discussions with mediators or lawyers
- » Hiding income and assets in order to minimise the amount of child support or refusing to pay child support or child care.
- » Manipulating the child support and Centrelink systems to stop or reduce your benefits
- » Forcing you to move house and/or change jobs to incur costs for you or make it hard for you to claim your benefits
- » Dragging out legal proceedings to incur costs and delay settlement, making it hard for you to get or keep a job
- » Promising to stop abusive behaviour in return for your acceptance of less of your entitlement.

FINDING WHERE THE MONEY HAS GONE

If you have you have grounds to suspect your ex-partner has hidden a lot of money and other assets, you could use a forensic accountant to assist you to find it. This service can be expensive, but the accountant should be able to advise whether it is worth pursuing. You can also enquire about a 'no win, no fee' arrangement. Forensic accountants work alongside your lawyer. Find a

forensic accountant through your lawyer, or search the **Certified Practising Accountant Australia** website: www.cpaaustralia.com.au.

You can find out other ways to reclaim your power and protect yourself from continued financial abuse in the section on 'Getting Back Control of Your Money' on page 12.



8 Managing your money and debts

Financial tools can help you manage your money now and help you plan for your financial future.

Printed tools

WIRE's *My Money Conversation Kit* is a kit that can help you keep track of your finances. It comes with a 36-page organiser to list your financial information and where you've stored it, a 20-page booklet on talking about money and where to find more information, and an 8-page how-to booklet with a checklist to help you organise your financial life.

You can download the kit from www.wire.org.au/my-money-conversation-kit and print it out.

Digital tools

- » Working out your net financial worth – what you own versus what you owe: www.moneySMART.gov.au/tools-and-resources/calculators-and-tools/your-net-worth-calculator
- » Using a budget: www.moneySMART.gov.au/tools-and-resources/calculators-and-tools/budget-planner

Get help with your debts

Facing your debts can be overwhelming. Eventually, debts that cannot be waived need to be repaid, so it's important to take action as soon as possible. You can start by creating your own debt management plan, where you list all your debts and work out which ones to pay first. Visit www.moneySMART.gov.au/managing-your-money/managing-debts for online calculators and practical tips on managing your debt.

If you are having trouble paying debts speak to your financial counsellor about your loan agreements, and talk to your bank and utilities companies about getting a hardship variation.

For immediate help, you can call the **National Debt Helpline (1800 007 007)** to speak to a financial counsellor or call **WIRE (1300 134 130)** to locate a financial counsellor in your area.

Loan agreements

Financial counsellors are free and part of a community service and can help you negotiate your debt repayments with your bank, utilities and other creditors.

Financial planners (or advisers) assist people to manage their assets by providing investment advice. They charge fees and work for businesses that hold an Australian Financial Services licence.

Explore whether your loans can be restructured into smaller, more manageable repayments. Bring a trusted friend or family member to support you when you talk to banks and other creditors about your loans. You can also check with a financial counsellor to see if you are eligible for low-interest loans.

A lawyer from the **Consumer Action Law Centre** can also look at your loan agreements to explore your options. Contact details for the Consumer Action Law Centre and services that provide financial counselling are listed in the Appendix on page 27.

TIP: Not all bank staff are aware about family violence and financial abuse. Call your bank's hardship team as this team is more likely to have had training about the issues you are experiencing.

Consolidating debts

Consolidating all your debts into one loan can be an option for some but not necessarily for everybody. So check first with a financial counsellor or call the **National Debt Helpline** 1800 007 007 to make sure you make the best decision for your situation.

You can find out more about that here: www.moneysmart.gov.au/managing-your-money/managing-debts/consolidating-and-refinancing-debts

Hardship variations

Many banks have a special financial hardship team. In the short term, your bank may:

- » Defer your loan repayments for up to three months
- » Waive fees on new loans
- » Waive penalties on your loan
- » Restructure your loan

Contact your bank as early as possible to negotiate a different payment schedule. For a full list of bank contact numbers, visit the **Australian Banking Association** website: www.ausbanking.org.au/contact-us/.

You can apply for hardship variations with other loan organisations and utilities companies (such as electricity) by visiting the relevant organisation's website and completing their online application form. You can also use the letter template on the National Debt Helpline website to send a written application to the organisation. See www.ndh.org.au/debt-solutions/Negotiate-payment-terms.

Claiming bankruptcy

Often people think bankruptcy is the only solution but often there are other options that may be far better for your situation. By voluntarily claiming bankruptcy, you are legally released from almost all your debts which you are unable to pay. If you owe a total of \$5,000 or more, your creditors can also force you into bankruptcy.

IMPORTANT

Before making a decision about bankruptcy, you should get independent advice. Call the National Debt Helpline (1800 007 007) or speak to a financial counsellor to discuss alternative options. You can also visit www.moneySMART.gov.au/managing-your-money-managing-debts/trouble-with-debt/bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy lasts for three years from the day it is declared, but is noted on your credit report for seven years. **Bankruptcy should not be entered into lightly.**

When bankrupt, you can earn up to approximately \$50,000 a year after tax and keep your basic household goods and your car if its value is less than \$7,350. However, you may have difficulty getting credit for seven years, lose assets such as your house and be limited in your career options, for example in the finance sector.

Scams and traps

Some companies and lenders target people in debt and other types of financial crises and you could be especially vulnerable. Before making any commitments, or signing any loan agreement, visit www.moneySMART.gov.au/scams for more information or speak to a financial counsellor.

Build your financial future

Once you have your finances in order or have finished settlement, you might want to start thinking about your financial future. Visit www.moneySMART.gov.au for free resources and financial tools on superannuation, insurance and investments.



Financial advice & support

WIRE An information and referral service for women, nonbinary and gender diverse people in Victoria	1300 134 130 Monday to Friday, 9.30am–4.30pm support@wire.org.au www.wire.org.au
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FIND A FINANCIAL COUNSELLOR

National Debt Helpline	1800 007 007 (free call) (open 9:30am – 5pm Mon – Fri) www.ndh.org.au
Financial Counselling Australia	www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au

AGENCIES AND RESOURCES

Australian Financial Security Authority	1300 364 785 www.afsa.gov.au/debtors/personal-insolvency-information
Australian Banking Association	(02) 8298 0417 www.ausbanking.org.au/policy/customers/financial-hardship/

WIRE Information Booklet

Australian Taxation Office	13 28 61 www.ato.gov.au/individuals/
Centrelink Families & Parents Line	13 61 50 (open 8am – 8pm Mon – Fri)
Certified Practising Accountant Australia (to find a forensic accountant)	1300 737 373 www.cpa.australia.com.au
Child Support Agency	13 12 72 (open 8:30am – 4:45pm Mon – Fri) www.csa.gov.au
Community Legal Centres (to find your local community legal centre)	www.communitylaw.org.au or call WIRE: 1300 134 130
Consumer Action Law Centre	1800 466 477 / (03) 9629 6300 (open 10am – 1pm Mon – Fri)
Department of Human Services – Families	www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/child-support-basics
Family Court	1300 352 000 (open 8:45am – 4:30pm Mon – Fri) www.familylawcourts.gov.au
Australian Financial Complaints Authority	1800 931 678 www.afca.org.au
Good Shepherd (for low-income loans)	9495 9600 goodshepherdmicrofinance.org.au/services/no-interest-loan-scheme-nils
The Law Handbook Online	www.fitzroy-legal.org.au/lawhandbook

Victoria Law Foundation	www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/free-publications-and-resources/law-help-guide-2018
Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help phone line	1300 792 387 (open 8:45am – 5:15pm Mon – Fri) www.legalaid.vic.gov.au
Women's Legal Service Victoria	1800 133 302 / (03) 8622 0600 (open 6:30 – 8:30pm Tues & Thurs) www.womenslegal.org.au

FREE FINANCIAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Financial Capability for Women	www.womentalkmoney.org.au
Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)	1300 300 630 www.asic.gov.au/ infoline@asic.gov.au
ASIC's MoneySmart	www.moneysmart.gov.au/
Consumer Affairs Victoria	1300 558 181 www.consumer.vic.gov.au

FINANCIAL PLANNERS

Financial Planning Association of Australia	1300 626 393 www.fpa.asn.au
ASIC's MoneySmart (for tips on choosing a financial planner)	1300 300 630 www.moneysmart.gov.au

FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT GROUPS

<p>Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre</p> <p>A state-wide crisis line that can connect you with local services or provide temporary accommodation and support</p>	<p>1800 015 188 www.safesteps.org.au</p>
<p>1800RESPECT</p> <p>A 24/7 counselling service for people experiencing family violence and/or sexual assault</p>	<p>1800 737 732 www.1800respect.org.au</p>
<p>Victims of Crime Helpline</p>	<p>1800 819 817 / 0427 767 891 (for text messages) vsa@justice.vic.gov.au www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au</p>
<p>Victoria Sexual Assault Crisis Line</p>	<p>1800 806 292 ahcasa@thewomens.org.au www.casa.org.au</p>
<p>Domestic Violence Outreach Services</p>	<p>Call WIRE (1300 134 130) for contact details in your area</p>
<p>Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria</p>	<p>www.dvrcv.org.au/talk-someone/victorian-services</p>
<p>The Lookout Lists family violence and support services in your area</p>	<p>www.thelookout.org.au/service-directory</p>
<p>Men's Referral Service</p>	<p>1300 766 491 mrs.org.au</p>

SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES

You may have physical, cultural, language, geographical and social barriers to seeking support and assistance. Past experience may also significantly impact on a person being able to seek help.

For these reasons, **specialist services are available for victim-survivors depending on your individual requirements.** You can always contact a service specific to your circumstance for support and advocacy.

<p>Djirra Provides culturally safe and holistic support and representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by family violence and sexual assault.</p>	<p>1800 105 303 www.djirra.org.au</p>
<p>Switchboard Victoria Provides peer-driven support services for LGBTIQ+ people</p>	<p>1800 184 527 www.switchboard.org.au</p>
<p>With Respect Specialist LGBTIQ+ service that supports people affected by family violence</p>	<p>1800 LGBTIQ (that's 1800 542 847) www.withrespect.org.au/contact</p>
<p>inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence Provides integrated, culturally tailored services to migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence</p>	<p>1800 755 988 / (03) 9413 6500 www.intouch.org.au</p>
<p>Seniors Rights Victoria Provides support to help prevent elder abuse and protect rights and independence of older people</p>	<p>1300 368 821 info@seniorsrights.org.au www.seniorsrights.org.au</p>

Call us:



1300 134 130

Weekdays 9am to 5pm
(mobile costs may vary)



Visit us:

372 Spencer Street,
West Melbourne 3003
Weekdays 9.30am to 4.30pm



Contact us:

support@wire.org.au



Chat online, download resources
and book into events:

wire.org.au

(Chat weekdays only)



Stay up to date:

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twitter.com/wirewomensinfo

We acknowledge the First Nations people as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia

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Women's Information
and Referral Exchange
Inc. Reg. No. A122
ABN 98 957 157 895



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any woman **any issue**