

Financial Abuse

What is financial abuse?

Financial abuse happens when someone improperly uses, controls, or takes another person's money, property, assets, or financial resources for their own benefit.

It can happen in family, domestic, friendship, care, or business relationships. It can also occur through scams and fraud. Financial abuse often involves a misuse of trust, authority, influence, or power.

Financial abuse is not just a disagreement about money. It involves controlling, exploiting, or disadvantaging another person for financial gain.

Financial abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, culture, income, or personal circumstances. It is often carried out by someone known to the person experiencing abuse and may happen alongside emotional, psychological, physical, or domestic abuse.

Common types of financial abuse

Family and elder financial abuse

This can happen when family members, friends, carers, or other trusted people misuse an older person's money, property, or assets.

Examples include:

- Pressuring someone to lend or give money.
- Using another person's bank account without permission.
- Misusing a Power of Attorney or guardianship arrangement.
- Forcing or pressuring someone to change their will.
- Selling or transferring property without proper consent.

- Withholding access to money needed for daily living expenses.
- Taking out debts in another person's name.
- Taking control of bank accounts, passwords, or financial records.
- Using joint account access for personal benefit.
- Pressuring a person to transfer property, savings, or investments.
- Living in a person's home without contributing to expenses.

Domestic and family violence

Financial abuse is a common form of domestic and family violence. It is often used to control another person.

Examples include:

- Controlling all household finances.
- Stopping a partner from working or earning income.
- Restricting access to bank accounts, credit cards, or financial information.
- Monitoring spending excessively.
- Requiring permission for everyday purchases.
- Forcing a partner to take out loans, guarantees, or credit facilities.
- Keeping wages, benefits, or other income.
- Threatening financial consequences if a relationship ends.

Misuse of authority

Financial abuse can happen when a person uses legal authority for their own benefit instead of acting in the best interests of the person they represent.

Examples include:

- Misusing a Power of Attorney.
- Misusing guardianship arrangements.
- Using authority to transfer assets or property.
- Making financial decisions that mainly benefit the representative.

Property and housing abuse

A person's home or property may be used or controlled for someone else's benefit.

Examples include:

- Pressuring a person to sell their home.
- Transferring property without informed consent.
- Using a person's property as security for someone else's debts.
- Refusing to leave a property after agreed arrangements have ended.
- Preventing a person from accessing or controlling their own property.

Scam and fraud-related abuse

Financial abuse may also happen through scams, fraud, deception, or unauthorised access to financial accounts.

Examples include:

- Manipulating a person into transferring money.
- Gaining access to online banking details.
- Using deception to obtain money or assets.
- Romance scams.
- Investment scams.
- Impersonation scams.
- Unauthorised use of debit or credit cards.
- Identity theft and account takeover.

Digital and technology-based abuse

Technology can be used to gain control over another person's finances.

Examples include:

- Accessing online banking without permission.
- Changing passwords or account access details.

- Intercepting security codes or authentication messages.
- Monitoring financial activity through electronic devices.
- Making unauthorised electronic transactions.

Exploitation and financial manipulation

Financial exploitation happens when someone uses pressure, guilt, intimidation, or influence to gain a financial benefit.

Examples include:

- Repeated requests for loans that are never repaid.
- Pressure to provide gifts, money, or financial support.
- Being charged for goods or services that are unnecessary or never provided.
- Pressure to invest in unsuitable schemes.
- Threats to withdraw care, support, or companionship.

Warning signs

A person may be experiencing financial abuse if they:

- Suddenly have difficulty paying bills.
- Appear fearful, anxious, or reluctant to discuss money.
- Are pressured to make unusual financial decisions.
- Have unexplained withdrawals, transfers, or debts.
- Experience sudden changes in banking arrangements.
- Change legal documents unexpectedly.
- Lose control of their banking arrangements.
- Become isolated from trusted family members or advisers.
- Have property or assets transferred unexpectedly.
- Have a family member, friend, or carer who controls all financial decisions.
- Are prevented from accessing financial records or account information.

Who is most at risk?

Financial abuse can affect anyone. Some people may be at higher risk, including:

- Older people.
- People with cognitive impairment or disability.
- People experiencing domestic and family violence.
- People who are socially isolated.
- People who rely on others for care or support.
- People experiencing illness, grief, or major life changes.
- People who are unfamiliar with digital banking and technology.

Impacts of financial abuse

Financial abuse can result in:

- Loss of savings, investments, and assets.
- Increased debt.
- Reduced financial independence.
- Housing insecurity.
- Loss of access to essential services.
- Stress, anxiety, and loss of confidence.
- Poorer physical and mental wellbeing.
- Family conflict and relationship breakdown.

What to do if financial abuse is suspected

Immediate steps

- Write down concerns and keep records.
- Review bank accounts and transactions.
- Seek independent legal and financial advice.
- Consider changing passwords and banking access.
- Review Powers of Attorney and other authorities.
- Speak with trusted family members or advisers.
- Contact the financial institution involved.

How BankWAW can help

BankWAW can:

- Discuss concerns about suspicious account activity.
- Help review account transactions.
- Help customers understand available banking protections.
- Support vulnerable customers.
- Investigate suspicious transactions where appropriate.
- Provide guidance on protecting banking access and personal information.

Support services

- 1800RESPECT – Domestic, family, and sexual violence support.
- eSafety Commissioner – Online abuse and safety support.
- Services Australia Financial Information Service – Financial guidance and support.
- National Debt Helpline – Free financial counselling.
- Elder abuse helplines – Available in every state and territory.
- Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) – 1800 700 600.
- Victoria Elder Abuse Helpline – 1800 353 374.
- Legal Aid and community legal centres.
- Police, where theft, fraud, or criminal conduct is suspected.

Recognising the warning signs and taking early action can help reduce financial loss and personal harm.

If you are concerned that financial abuse may be occurring, visit your local BankWAW Service Centre or call **1300 368 555**.

BankWAW

www.bankwaw.com.au

1300 368 555