

Identity Theft: How to Resolve Errors on Your Credit Report

You're in foster care and your caseworker or other individual has just told you that your identity has been stolen! On your credit report, there are a lot of accounts that you never opened or even knew about. Identity theft is a serious problem and can make you feel very hurt, but there are concrete steps you can take to help solve the problem. If you are over the age of 14 and in foster care, your child welfare agency is responsible to help you resolve those inaccuracies. If you have exited foster care and are checking your credit report, this information can also be helpful. Read on for more details.

Will I have to pay off the fraudulent accounts? If someone used your information without your consent to open accounts, you can take steps so that you are not held liable for the debts. You or your caseworker, will need to follow the steps outlined here to establish that the accounts were the result of identity theft.

Why should I care about me or my caseworker resolving the identity theft on my credit report? It may take a lot of effort to resolve the identity theft, but it is extremely important to do so. There are a number of serious consequences of identity theft:

- Many prospective landlords and employers look at credit reports prior to renting apartments or making hiring decisions, so you may not get hired or be able to get a good apartment if you have negative information on your credit report.
- It will be very difficult for you to qualify for a credit card or a car loan. If you do qualify, you will pay higher interest rates than you would if the negative information were not on your credit report.
- The negative information can stay on your report for as long as seven years if you don't do anything about it, so it could affect you long into the future.
- Negative credit history can also keep you from getting a cell phone, cable, and other utilities in your name.
- You may be sued for the accounts that were fraudulently opened in your name and have to go to court.

Resolving identify theft issues. What to do to get started? If you are in foster care, then the child welfare agency is required to assist you in resolving these inaccuracies. Regardless of who is doing it, the step are similar. The first step is to stop any further damage by calling one of the Credit Reporting Agencies (CRAs) to place an initial fraud alert. They're each required to notify the other two CRAs about your fraud alert. You can read more about the fraud alert process and how to renew your alert after the initial alert expires here: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0275-place-fraud-alert>.

Your next big step is to create an Identity Theft Report which consists of an Identity Theft Affidavit, submitted to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and filing a police report.

Tip Sheet Series for Youth in Foster Care

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Resolve Errors on Your
Credit Report

Protect Yourself and Your
Stuff: What You Need to
Know About Insurance

Get Tax Savvy: What You
Need to Know About Taxes

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The identity theft affidavit can be filed online or you can call the FTC. In the affidavit, you will provide some details and swear that the fraudulent accounts were not opened by you. If you were under 18 when the fraudulent accounts were opened, you should be certain to note that in your identity theft affidavit. You will need to provide your copy of the affidavit to your local law enforcement precinct to make a police report about the identity theft. You will be asked to provide other documents depending on the State laws and what is required by the local precinct. You can read more details about how to complete an identity theft report and get all the forms you need at the Federal Trade Commission website here: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0277-create-identity-theft-report>.

When you're writing your Identity Theft Affidavit or assisting your caseworker in completing it, it is very important that you answer questions truthfully. You may later need to provide updates. Be sure to keep records of dates and report numbers and agencies that you contact and where you have filed reports. You can download this tracker and keep track of your progress with this Identity Theft Report Tracker.

Identity Theft Report Tracker

Step 1: Place Fraud Alert

CRA Numbers:

Equifax: 800-525-6285

Experian: 888-397-3742

TransUnion: 800-680-7289

Date you called to place initial fraud alert: _____

Date initial fraud alert expires (add 90 days from date alert placed): _____

Step 2: Complete Identity Theft Affidavit

Date by which I'll complete (don't delay!): _____

Step 3: Obtain Police Report

Precinct address: _____

Precinct phone number: _____

Hours of operation: _____

Date I will go to make report (don't delay!): _____

What if I know for certain who stole my identity and I don't want to get them in trouble? If your ID is stolen by a parent, sibling, or other friend or relative, this can be a sticky situation. You may feel betrayed. You may have reservations about turning that person in, or filing a police report. You may be pressured by that person not to file a police report. It is a tough decision to have to make. **You may also want to speak to an advocate about additional counseling if your identity was stolen by someone you trusted.**

While it's not possible to say how the police will treat your case and the person you identified as the identity thief, law enforcement officials often do not have the resources to pursue cases against people who committed small level identity theft. When it comes to identity theft prosecutions, law enforcement typically pursues large identify theft rings that steal hundreds or thousands of people's identities.

So how do I make the identity theft disappear? Once you have your identity theft report, you or your caseworker are ready to send letters to each of the businesses where a fraudulent account was opened in your name. You can get templates for that letter and read more about the process here: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0283-ask-business-close-new-account-opened-your-name>. You or your caseworker should also send this letter that asks each of the CRAs to block the fraudulent information from your credit reports: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0287-ask-credit-reporting-company-block-information>.

What else can I do to keep my accounts safe? There are some additional steps you can take after you find your identity has been stolen and your credit has been compromised. Your identity may still be at risk of further use, so it is a good idea to continue to take action on your own behalf. Some of the items below may only apply if you are 18 or older.

- You may want to have your bank account number changed. Banks will do this, generally, without a charge.
- You can ask creditors to apply a special code or user ID to access the account, so that your social security number and date of birth are not the only verification identifiers.
- Ask that documents sent through the mail or electronically do not have your social security number on them or ask that they use only the last 4 digits.
- Renew the alerts on your credit reports when they expire. You can do this through the CRAs.
- Request credit reports annually and check for discrepancies.