

5 Easy Ways to Protect Seniors from Financial Abuse

By Mike Hanna

Technology has helped to streamline the way we manage our money, allowing us to perform transactions and monitor our accounts online, instead of needing to do everything in-person. These tools are simple to use, getting better every year, and don't cost any more than the traditional methods.

But there are risks involved, especially for our seniors. This vulnerable population is more likely to fall victim to the fraud and abuse that has come along with this digital revolution. Whether it's phishing attempts, fraudulent lotteries, or exploitation by deceitful caregivers, these threats are becoming more common and more sophisticated.

There are ways to help mitigate these risks. Here are five essential strategies that should help:

1. Facilitate Discussions: Prevention starts with awareness. Initiate regular family conversations about the various forms of financial abuse. This proactive approach not only educates seniors but also creates a supportive environment where they feel comfortable sharing their concerns. Discussing news stories, sharing articles, or attending community workshops on financial scams can be part of these discussions.

2. Simplify Finances: Streamlining finances can significantly help elders in managing their money. This can involve reducing the number of credit cards, consolidating bank accounts, and setting up automatic bill payments. Simplification makes it easier for seniors to track and monitor their finances, reducing the risk of unnoticed fraudulent activity.

3. Regular Monitoring: It's important to consistently review your financial statements for suspicious activity. Key warning signs include:

- Unusual withdrawals or transfers: Large, unexplained withdrawals or unfamiliar transfers can indicate unauthorized access to accounts.
- Missing deposits: Expected deposits that do not appear in the account as scheduled could suggest interference.
- Odd charges: Charges from unknown sources or for unfamiliar services/products need investigation.
- Changes in spending patterns: A deviation from regular spending habits may signal that someone else is using the account.

Additionally, setting up alerts for these activities is beneficial. Seniors can designate trusted individuals - be it family members, friends, or a family lawyer - to receive these alerts. This network of trusted contacts helps to ensure that if the senior misses something, someone else can catch it.

4. Secure Legal Documents: Ensuring that all legal documents (such as wills, trusts, and powers of attorneys) are regularly updated and securely stored is crucial. Engaging a trusted attorney or financial professional for periodic reviews helps in maintaining their relevance and understanding. Limit access to these documents to only a few trusted individuals, like a designated family member or a financial professional, while keeping the rest of the family informed about their existence and location.

5. Exercise Caution in Sharing Information: Emphasize to your loved ones the critical importance of never sharing personal information, such as Social Security numbers, account numbers, or other financial details, over the phone unless they are the one initiating the call. This is vital in preventing identity theft.

Teach them how to verify the identity of callers and the legitimacy of their requests, even when they claim to represent well-known organizations. Additionally, educating seniors about scammers' tactics, such as creating urgency or using threatening language, is crucial to help prevent them from being manipulated into divulging sensitive information.

By implementing these strategies, we not only protect our seniors from financial predators but also empower them with the confidence and tools to manage their finances safely. In doing so, we can help ensure that their golden years are marked by peace and security, rather than uncertainty and risk.

This article is educational and is not advice or a recommendation for any specific investment product, strategy, or service. The views and opinions expressed are those of Michael Hanna only. Any examples used are generic, hypothetical and for illustration purposes only. Investing involves risks, and past performance is not indicative of future results.

Michael Hanna is a registered representative of and offers securities and investment advisory services through MML Investor Services, LLC. MEMBER SIPC (WWW.SIPC.ORG). Azura Wealth Advisors is not a subsidiary or affiliate of MML Investors Services, LLC or its affiliated companies. 420 Lexington Ave, Suite 2510, New York, NY 10170. (212) 578-0300. Neither MML Investors Services, LLC nor any of its subsidiaries, employees or representatives are

authorized to give legal or tax advice. Consult your own personal attorney legal or tax counsel for advice on specific legal and tax matters. CRN202708-6817244