

CHILD IDENTITY THEFT

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Identity theft is becoming a bigger problem in the United States. As technology becomes more sophisticated, hackers are finding more and better ways to steal our identities. And the theft isn't limited to adults.

An identity is stolen every 2 seconds and one study found that about 10 percent of children are victims of identity theft before they turn 18.

Children are the perfect target for identity thieves. Children's Social Security numbers come with a blank credit file attached and it's unlikely that your 3-year-old is checking his annual credit report.

Here are steps you can take to protect your child's credit from fraud:

1. Know the warning signs.

Know and look for warning signs that your child's credit history has already been compromised. These signs include:

- An influx of credit card and loan offers addressed to your child
- An Internal Revenue Service notice that your child didn't pay income taxes or was claimed as a dependent on another tax return
- Collection calls or bills addressed to your child
- Your child is denied a bank account or driver's license

2. Check your child's credit report.

- Unfortunately, checking your child's credit report isn't as simple as checking your own. You'll have to mail or fax in documentation proving that you are, indeed, your child's parent or guardian. This may include copies of the child's birth certificate and Social Security card, a copy of your own ID and a list of the last few addresses for the child.
- Each of the three major credit bureaus – Experian, Equifax and TransUnion – has its own process for checking a minor's credit report. Check the individual credit union's website to get more details.
- Keep in mind that your child may not even have a credit report. **This is a good thing!** No credit file means that your child's Social Security number and other information haven't been used to get any credit. However, just because Experian, for instance, reports that your child has no credit file, it doesn't mean that he has no file with Equifax or TransUnion. Not all creditors report to all three bureaus, so many times they'll have different information. If you do suspect identity theft, check your child's reports with each of the three credit bureaus.

- How often should you check your child's credit score? That just depends. You probably don't want to go through the hassle annually, but you should check your child's credit as soon as possible if you suspect she's been a victim of identity theft.

If you find out that your Child Is a Victim

- If your child becomes a victim of identity theft, file a police report and add a victim statement to his file.
- Go to **IdentityTheft.gov** for next steps – this can help no matter what your child's specific situation is.

The most important thing you can do to protect your child's credit is to simply be aware. Don't give out your child's Social Security number – even to family members – and watch for signs of fraud. Consider pulling your child's credit report every few years, just to be sure nothing is amiss, and report any identity theft immediately.



If you have questions about this or any business or tax issue, please contact your Conner Ash Account Manager or [Jill Cooper, CPA](mailto:jcooper@connerash.com), at (314) 205-2510 or via email at jcooper@connerash.com.