

How safe is your child's identity?

We've all been taught the many ways to protect our own identities, but what about our children? Children are now issued social security numbers at birth and since they usually don't use them until they are older this makes them a prime target for identity theft. According to the Federal Trade Commission, ten million people each year are victims of identity theft and the number of these that are minors is growing at an alarming rate. Imagine your teenager applying for a student loan and being turned down because they have a foreclosure on their credit report from when they were 2 years old. Sound ridiculous? It happens; all too often.

While adults can put a "freeze" on their credit reports to protect their identities, this isn't usually an option for children. In order to freeze your credit file, you must have a credit file and since children don't have credit, they have no file to freeze. If a child does have a credit file chances are they have already been a victim of identity theft.

The first step to protect your children is to ensure they have no file with the three credit bureaus. Each credit bureau has specific requirements for requesting information about a child's credit report:

For Experian you must send:

- A letter requesting a copy of the child's credit report
- A copy of the parent's drivers license
- Proof of the parent's address (such as a copy of a bank statement or utility bill)
- A copy of the child's birth certificate
- A copy of the child's social security card
- Previous addresses for the last 2 years
- The child's full name

Mail to: Experian, PO Box 9532, Allen, TX 75013.

After searching their database for any files they will mail the results to the parent.



Advantage Credit, Inc. Credit Reporting Services

Sharing Knowledge and Providing Old Fashioned Customer Service Since 1993

www.AdvCredit.com 1-800-670-7993

For Equifax you must send:

- A letter requesting they search for a file for the child
- A copy of the child's social security card
- The child's full name
- The child's address
- The child's date of birth

Mail to: Equifax Minor Child Department, PO Box 105139, Atlanta, GA 30348

If a file is found, Equifax will place an alert on the child's social security number and will mail back the results to the parent.

For Trans Union:

Send an email to childtheft@transunion.com and ask to check for a credit file under the child's name or social security number. If no file is found they will send an email to the parent telling them so. If a file is found they will request more information. This can include:

- A copy of the child's social security card
- The child's address
- The child's full name
- The child's date of birth along with a copy of the birth certificate
- A copy of the parent's utility bill with a current address.

Mail to: Trans Union, PO Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 98234

Since you will be sending very high risk documents through the mail it is suggested you send them registered, return receipt mail.

There are some things to watch for that can be indicators your child has been a victim of identity theft:

1. If your child receives any preapproved credit card offers in the mail.
2. If your child starts receiving phone calls from collection agencies.
3. You try to open a financial account for your child such as a savings account and one already exists.
4. You try to open a savings account for your child and they are denied due to a poor credit history.
5. Your child receives an "earnings statement" from the IRS.



Advantage Credit, Inc. Credit Reporting Services

Sharing Knowledge and Providing Old Fashioned Customer Service Since 1993

www.AdvCredit.com 1-800-670-7993

Proactive steps that can be taken to help ensure your child does not become a victim of identity theft are:

- Lock up their social security card. Do not let them carry it with them.
- Educate them on the importance of keeping their personal information private.
- Monitor their internet activity. Make sure they are not disclosing too much personal information on social networking sights.
- If you allow your child to purchase anything online using your credit card make sure the website is secured and monitor the transaction.
- Make sure they know to never give their social security number to anyone over the phone or internet.
- When your child becomes 15 add them as an authorized user to one of your credit cards. This will create a credit file for them and make it easier to check their credit on a regular basis through www.annualcreditreport.com.
- Sign up for Experian's credit monitoring service FamilySecure.com. This will let you know if someone has tried to use your child's information when applying for credit even if they do not have a credit file.

Stealing a child's identity is a very real and fast growing threat. While the credit bureaus are aware of the vulnerability of children's identity information, it may be sometime before there is a resolution to this problem. In the meantime it is just as important to protect your child's identity as it is your own. Educate your children and monitor their activities. In the long run you can save both you and your child a lot of heartache, money and time.

Mindy Leisure
Advantage Credit Inc.
mindy@advcredit.com



Advantage Credit, Inc. Credit Reporting Services

Sharing Knowledge and Providing Old Fashioned Customer Service Since 1993

www.AdvCredit.com 1-800-670-7993