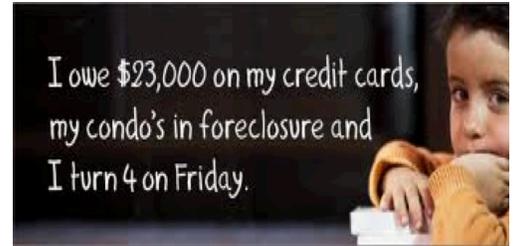


Child ID Theft



Adults aren't the only ones who can have their identity stolen. Tens of millions of American children had their Social Security numbers, date of birth and health care ID numbers stolen in the early-2015 data breach at health insurance giant Anthem Inc. This exposes these kids to the real risk of identity theft. "Criminals will use those stolen Social Security numbers to open accounts, get medical treatment, commit tax fraud, you name it," predicted Adam Levin, chairman and founder of IDentityTheft 911, in an NBCNews.com article.

Child ID theft: According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), child ID theft happens when someone uses a minor's personal information to commit fraud. A thief may steal and use a child's information to get a job, government benefits, medical care, utilities, a car loan or a mortgage. Avoiding, discovering and undoing the damage resulting from the theft can be a challenge. A thief who steals a child's information may use it for years before the crime is discovered. How? Well, most parents or guardians are not checking their child's credit file—they may not even realize they have one. The child victim may learn of ID theft only years later, when applying for credit, a job, an apartment or insurance.

According to the FTC, there are a few signs that can tip you off to the theft: (1) A child or a family is denied government benefits because benefits are being paid to another account that is using the child's Social Security number; (2) You are getting calls from collection agencies, bills from credit card companies or medical providers, or offers for credit cards or bank accounts in your child's name, even if your child has never applied for or used these services; (3) After you file a tax return listing your child's name and Social Security number, you get a notice from the IRS saying that the same information is listed on another return; and (4) Your child gets a notice from the IRS stating that he or she failed to pay taxes on income, even though your child has no income.

Who typically steals a child's identity? According to Equifax credit reporting agency, there are two categories of people who are stealing and using children's identifying information:

- **Unknown perpetrator:** Thieves that have either stolen or purchased the Social Security number and sometimes other identifying information of a child.
- **Family members:** A reality of child identity theft is the fact that parents or family members of a child have been found to use the child's identifying information, often in a time of desperation.

If you think your child's information is at risk—specifically, you see warning signs, or you may have lost your child's Social Security card, had a break-in, or your child's information was compromised in a data breach at school or in a doctor/dentist office—you may want to check whether your child has a credit report. According to the FTC, you should contact each of the three national credit reporting agencies in writing to request a manual

search of your child's file. Each agency will check for files relating to the child's name and/or Social Security number. **There is a sample letter in the MoneyWi\$e ID theft lesson plan** (www.consumer-action.org/downloads/english/ID_Theft_Lesson_2014.pdf) that can be used to request the check. The credit reporting agencies may require copies of the child's birth certificate listing the parents; the child's Social Security card; and the parent or guardian's government-issued ID proving the adult requesting the search is the child's parent or legal guardian.

Protect your child's personal information at school: According to the FTC, the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, enforced by the U.S. Department of Education, protects the privacy of student records. It also gives parents of school-age kids the right to opt out of sharing information. A copy of the FTC's fact sheet "Protecting Your Child's Personal Information at School" can be downloaded at www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/protecting-your-childs-personal-information-school.

Recovering from child identity theft: The three credit reporting agencies have specific child identity theft webpages with information, instructions, and forms to check and report a false credit report.

Protecting foster kids' credit: Children and youth in foster care are particularly vulnerable to ID theft because their personal information is often shared among caretakers, service providers and schools. The misuse of the child's identity may not be discovered until s/he exits the foster care system and applies for a cell phone, job, apartment or student loan. In 2011, Congress passed legislation to help youth in foster care better protect their credit. Now, when a foster child turns 16, child welfare agencies are required to get the youth's annual credit report. In cases of ID theft, the agency must help the youth clear up their credit. The FTC and Child Focus, Inc. created a guide entitled "Youth and Credit: Protecting the Credit of Youth in Foster Care" to provide anyone working with these young people with the tools to help if their identity has been stolen, and to teach teens about credit, why it is important to their future financial stability, and how bad credit can derail their goals. A copy can be downloaded at www.aecf.org/resources/youth-and-credit/.

Resources:

Child Identity Theft Education Kit (Equifax): www.equifax.com/specs/child-identity-protection-kit/child-kit.pdf

Child Identity Theft (TransUnion): www.transunion.com/childidentitytheft

"Safeguarding Your Child's Future" (FTC): www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0010-child-identity-theft.pdf

Child Identity Theft (FTC): www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0040-child-identity-theft

Free ChildScan Report (AllClear ID): www.allclearid.com/plans/child/