

How To Prevent Child Identity Theft



Does your child have a credit history? This question may seem bizarre, but the Federal Trade Commission has seen an uptick in identity theft among children.

With a child's Social Security number, a fraudster can open credit card and cell phone accounts and even apply for apartment leases and home loans. Because it would be unusual for a young child to have a credit history, no one thinks to run a credit check until the child is grown – making them an ideal identity theft target. Follow these three tips to help you safeguard your child's identity.

1. Protect your child's Social Security number.

Identity theft prevention starts with keeping close tabs on your child's personal data. As your son or daughter heads off to school and joins youth organizations, you'll find some forms asking for their Social Security number. Ask how your child's information will be used and stored before you share it with others.

Securely store all paper and electronic documents containing your child's Social Security number, and shred any hard copies before throwing them away. Keeping antivirus software up to date can also help prevent digital security breaches.

2. Educate your child on identity theft.

Once your child is old enough to access their Social Security number, teach them about safe internet use and the importance of keeping personal information private. Explain that clicking on links and downloading files from unknown sources can allow hackers to access financial and personal information. And let them know what identity theft could mean for your family.

3. Watch the mail for red flags.

If you receive a notice from the IRS that your child didn't pay taxes or bills in your child's name, he or she may be a victim of identity theft. Check with the three credit reporting companies (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) to see if he or she has a credit report.

Even without the presence of these red flags, when your child is around age 16, you might check to see if they have a credit report. That way if you discover any wrongdoing, you can correct it before they apply for a job or loan.

If your child has been the victim of identity theft, request in writing that all three credit reporting companies remove all accounts, account inquiries and collection notices associated with your child's name and Social Security number. Request that each reporting agency place a fraud alert on your child's account, and pass this same request along to each business where the information was used to help avoid future instances of fraud.

For more information on preventing and responding to child identity theft, visit consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0040-child-identity-theft.

