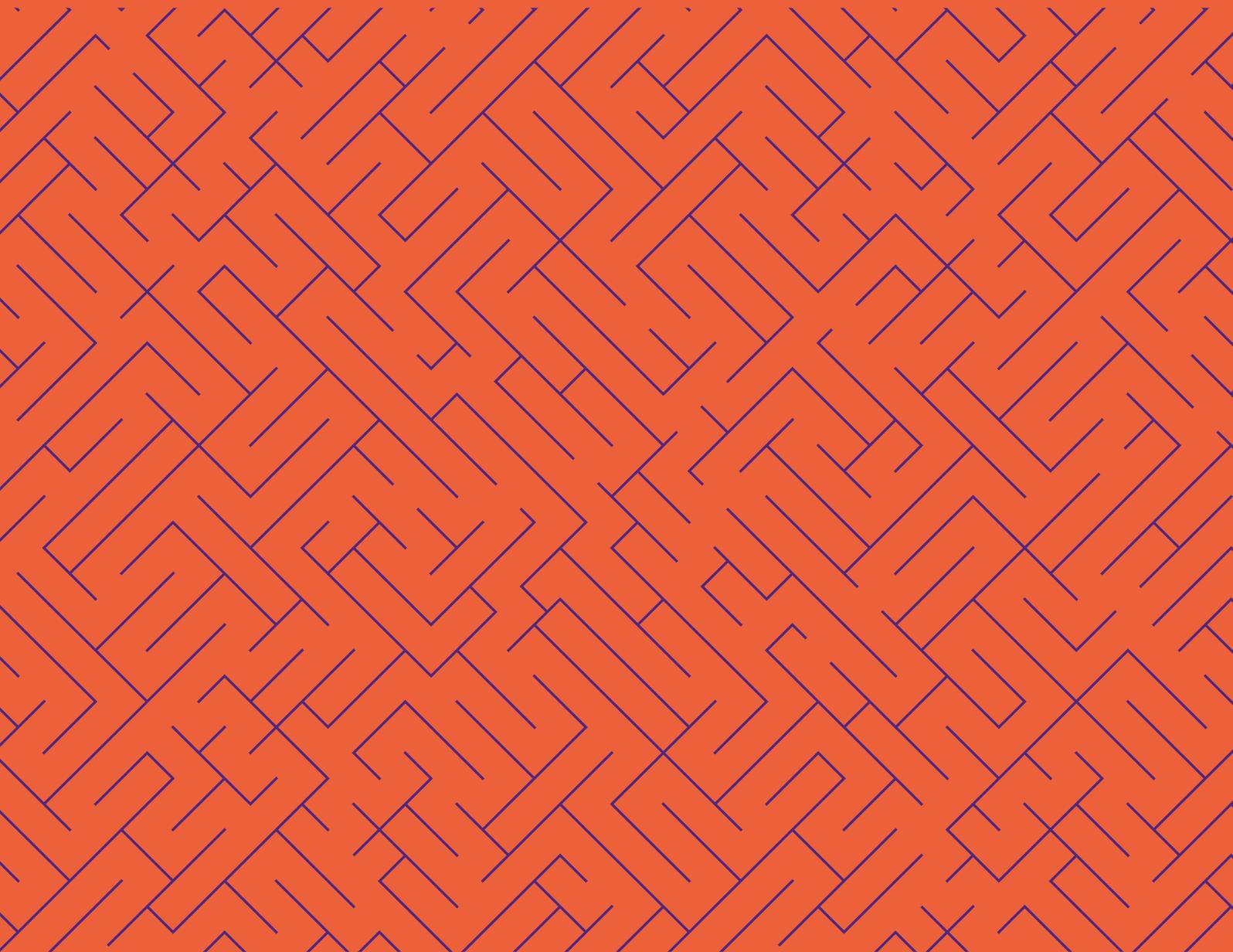


Economic abuse and your credit report

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**SURVIVING
ECONOMIC
ABUSE**

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Perpetrators of economic abuse often use their partner's credit – money they have borrowed – or take out credit on their partner's behalf.

If you or someone close to you has experienced economic abuse, this guide will help you understand how your finances could be linked to the abuser on your credit report. It will also help you understand how to break those links and how to be sure that nobody can access your address details through linked credit reports if you have moved.

Credit and economic abuse

“Then came multiple loan applications, all done via the clever banking app. Another way to manipulate and abuse, to take power and control away. Initially one, then another, then another, all taken out in my name.”

Domestic abuse can take many forms. Some abusers repeatedly dictate their partner's choices and control their everyday actions. An abuser may restrict how their partner acquires, uses and maintains money and other economic resources, such as accommodation, food, clothing and transport. This behaviour is known as **economic abuse**.

If you have experienced economic abuse, the abuser may have used your credit by:

- taking control of your existing credit facilities and using them
- applying for credit in your name.

Abusers often hide information from their partner. It's important to [check your credit report](#) and know whether there are credit agreements you are unaware of.

Economic control can be subtle and often takes place alongside other forms of domestic abuse (physical, sexual and psychological). Know that you are not alone. Specialist support is available (see below).

This resource has been produced in collaboration with Experian and some of the information relates specifically to their policies to support vulnerable customers. Where you obtain a credit report from another credit reference agency, you may wish to check that their policies also support you to stay safe.

What is a credit report?

There are three credit reference agencies in the UK – Experian, Equifax and TransUnion (formerly Callcredit). They hold information about your current and past credit agreements and how you managed them. They use this information to calculate a credit score for you. When you apply for credit, each lender will generate their own score based on your credit report, affordability and any records they have if you've banked with them.

The term 'credit provider' does not only include banks and credit card companies, but also mail order companies and for example, providers of mobile phone services. Employers and landlords can also check your credit report, although they'll usually only see public record information such as: electoral register information, insolvency records, County Court Judgments (or Decrees in Scotland).

What is a financial link on my credit report?

When you apply for joint credit with someone, for example a joint bank account or a joint mortgage, it will usually create a financial link. This is called a **financial association**. This means when you apply for credit in the future, the lender may look at the other person's credit report when they make a decision about your application.

If you have a financial association, it will be recorded on the credit report with details of the address you lived at when the application was made and the date you applied. It will also show the lender this information.

The address details remain the same, so even if you move address, it will never be shared in this section and your financial associate will not be able to see it.

Your safety

Only take any actions if you are sure it is safe to do so. You are the best judge of whether making any changes might lead to further harm from the abuser.

“The impact of economic abuse is practical – I have struggled to get a mortgage because he has left such an impact on my credit rating.”

How do I break a link with someone?

A financial disassociation is the process of removing the financial association or link you have with someone. You can break this link at any time as long as there are no existing 'open' accounts. This excludes a mortgage.

An open account includes all accounts that have never been closed, but do not need to be actively used. A defaulted account is classed as a closed account. This means you can still disassociate.

If you still have joint credit agreements together that are open, other than a mortgage, then you should speak to the lender about closing these down first.

You must disassociate with all three credit reference agencies – Experian, Equifax and TransUnion.

A financial disassociation means not only breaking the link with the other person you held the account/s with, but also means disassociating from the account itself. This is why you can only financially disassociate from closed accounts.

Can I break a financial link if we still have debts together?

This is possible if the debt is in a 'default' status. This means the terms of the agreement haven't been met and the account has been closed by the lender.

Even if you disassociate, the account will still show on both your credit reports.

What is the 'associate searches' section on my report?

When you have a financial association to someone, a creditor may look at your financial information when the person you are linked to applies for credit. This will be recorded as an associate search on your credit file. It does not mean that you have applied for credit or that a joint credit application has been made.

If you apply for credit, an associate search will appear on the credit file of anyone you are financially linked to if the creditor checked the file of that person as part of your application. The other person can see limited details about this on their report.

This does not reveal the address you currently live at. It only reveals:

- the name of the person applying
- the date of the application
- the name of the lender.

Experian will not share your new address in this section of your financial associates credit report. You may wish to check with other credit reference agencies about their policies.

Associate searches remain on the report for 12 months and are then removed. If you get a financial disassociation then no further entries will appear if either of you apply for credit.

“Bruises heal, credit files recover eventually. But hearts and minds will always remain fragile.”

Applying for new credit when you're financially linked

If you have a financial association and you apply for new credit at your new address, this will not be revealed on the credit report of anyone you have a financial association with. There is a section on each person's credit report where new credit applications are seen. However, someone you have a financial association with will not be able to see your new address in this section.

The only address information that the person you have a financial association with will be able to see is the address where the financial link was established. This is typically the previous address you both shared.

Should I change the address on a joint account?

If you have joint accounts together, it's a good idea to discuss these with the lender directly before you make any changes to addresses. You should advise them of the situation and make sure they know that you do not want your address details being shared. Each lender's process will be slightly different, so make sure you clarify all the details.

You may not want to update your address until they can confirm complete security. A lender may be able to make relevant notes to ensure new addresses are never divulged.

If you update address details with the lender on a joint account, Experian will not share this address with the other person, even if you are financially associated. The accounts are recorded on each other's credit report under a different address.

Can I stop someone applying for credit in my name?

If you're concerned someone will apply for credit in your name, you can add a password to your credit report to help prevent this. This is called a password notice of correction (NOC).

If you add a password NOC to your credit report then lenders should check this when you apply and request the password from you. Only you should know this. It's also free to add this with all credit reference agencies.

Make sure that your password is entirely unique and cannot be guessed, and that the abuser is unlikely to know. A good starting point is not to use passwords that contain your mother's maiden name, date of birth, children's names, first school or car etc.

If you are worried that someone might apply for credit in your name, you could register for a fraud prevention service such as [CIFAS](#). There is a cost for this service.

How to get your credit report

You can apply for your credit report either online or through a statutory application from the three main credit reference agencies – Experian, Equifax and TransUnion.

If you have recently moved address, it may be difficult to identify you at your current address. In some cases you may be asked for further documents to confirm your ID, such as a copy of any piece of photo ID (passport, driving licence, birth certificate) or bills or bank statements dated within the last three months.

If you find you have no bills or statements linking you to your current address, Experian will accept alternative documents. If you are in temporary accommodation such as a hostel or refuge, Experian will accept a signed letter from your housing manager or provider to confirm address details. If you're unsure then contact Experian for guidance.

If you find yourself in this situation and don't have all the required documents, you can visit your local Citizens Advice or another registered debt advice agency and ask them to apply for the credit report on your behalf. This can be posted directly to the advice centre.

You must complete a standard free statutory application and send a signed letter of authority. The advice centre will know how to do this and can guide you through the process.

When you apply for a credit report at your new address, you will create a link to that address on your credit report. This address will not be shared with anyone else and is personal to you and your credit report. It will only be seen by lenders when they check your credit report, for example when you apply for credit.

How to protect your financial details

Account security

After leaving the abuser, make sure you immediately login to all your existing personal accounts and change the password and security question details.

This can take some time, but it will avoid your data being compromised and used by someone who could be looking for you.

In general, these should be:

- email
- online banking
- credit report accounts
- other online accounts / memberships requiring login.

Lenders

Make sure you talk to all your lenders and try and explain the situation (with as much information as you're prepared to talk about).

Lenders should have practices in place to protect you and your details. If you need someone to support you (such as a domestic violence support service), they can often speak to a third party after relevant security checks.

You can use this as a chance to make sure they will not share or divulge any address details you might have on file. This could include adding relevant notes to your file.

How Experian can support you

If you have experienced economic abuse and someone has applied for credit on your behalf, Experian can help you query these applications with the lenders directly.

When you have a copy of your credit report, you can point out which accounts were opened without your consent and Experian will dispute these directly with the lenders. If you have any supporting evidence, for example court documents, then you can send these to Experian to pass on to all lenders.

If someone has used your existing credit or accounts without your consent, then it would be wise to contact those lenders directly and discuss the circumstances with them. This may mean talking through transactions you didn't make. This also gives you the chance to cancel any existing card details or remove additional cardholders.

Contacting the credit reference agencies

There are three credit reference agencies in the UK – Experian, Equifax and TransUnion. The details each agency holds may differ. Contact the agencies to check your credit rating and request changes to your record.

Experian

W www.experian.co.uk

T 0344 481 0800

Equifax

W www.equifax.co.uk

Members' help section at: help.equifax.co.uk/EquifaxOnlineHelp/s/

TransUnion

W www.transunion.co.uk

T 0330 024 7574

Further support

If you are experiencing economic abuse, you are not alone.

Contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline, run by Refuge, on **0808 2000 247** or the Men's Advice Line on **0808 801 0327**. If you are in immediate danger, call the police on **999**.

We have more information that can support you to take steps towards safety and begin to regain control of your finances.

Visit www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources for information including:

- How banks can help
- Steps you can take towards economic safety
- Organisations that can help

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it. We are determined that women are supported to survive and thrive.

Money Advice Plus is a specialist money and debt advice charity. It is the only charity with a national service dedicated to supporting domestic abuse survivors with their money worries to increase financial stability.

Experian believes data has the power to change lives. We're helping to guide people through life's big moments by staying in control of their finances, managing their money and accessing affordable credit they're more likely to get.

For more information

Visit www.survivingeconomicabuse.org

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