

When Loved Ones Steal: Preventing Financial Abuse by Family Members

Seniors have increasingly become the targets of shady con artists. An estimated 5 million elderly persons are victimized each year—losing a staggering \$36.4 billion dollars. We have all heard of scams in which strangers pose as IRS agents, Social Security personnel, or grandchildren in some kind of distress. However, there is another kind of financial exploitation that is less commonly discussed: family member fraud. Even those who are hyper-alert to attempts by strangers to steal their money or personal information, can be cruelly exploited by

those who profess to love and care for them.

How common is this problem? Writing in *Psychology Today* Dr. Stacey Wood, Ph.D., a leading expert on financial elder abuse and fraud, says “[r]oughly 6 in 10 cases of elder financial abuse are committed by relatives and 3 in 10 cases are traced to friends, neighbors, or home care aides. Because the abuse often happens over a long period of time, the amounts stolen tend to be higher than amounts in other forms of fraud against seniors.”

Experts in the field of elder financial abuse say that premeditated plans to steal from an elderly family member are rare. More likely, family fraud starts small and with a feeling of entitlement. For example, it could be that the grandchild who picks up groceries for her grandmother may feel she is owed some compensation for her efforts. While there is nothing inherently wrong with being paid for these kinds of services, payment should be planned, upfront, and everyone should be aware of it. In many cases those who are financially abusing a family member believe that they will inherit the money anyway and so there is nothing wrong with taking an “advance.” In many cases what starts a small amount of money taken here and there often grows to become thousands of stolen dollars.

There are “red flags”—warning signs—which may signal that someone you



It may be a red flag when a new ‘friend’ or a previously distant child or other relative suddenly becomes close to the senior.

care about is being financially exploited, says Dr. Wood:

- “A new ‘friend’ or a previously distant child or other relatives suddenly becoming close to the senior.
- A friend or relative in the person’s life who has addiction issues, financial difficulties, or a history of criminal activity.
- Having trouble paying bills or making purchases (food, clothing, medicines) that they could previously afford.
- A relative or caregiver acting as “gatekeeper” toward other family members, and avoiding having visitors or direct phone contact with the elderly person.
- Complaints of mislaid or missing items in the household, or suspicious transactions in bank or investment accounts that the senior cannot explain.
- A decline in mental acuity that can make them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

When Loved Ones Steal: Preventing Financial Abuse by Family Members

IN THIS Issue

- 1 When Loved Ones Steal: Preventing Financial Abuse by Family Members
- 2 White House Considering a Plan to Tighten Disability Eligibility
- 2 Comfort Food: Sweet (but Healthy) Popcorn
- 3 Grow Your Savings Account with Your Phone
- 3 Game Zone: Brain Teaser

Cuddigan Law

10855 West Dodge Road, Suite #101
Omaha, NE 68154
cuddiganlaw.com
402.933.5318

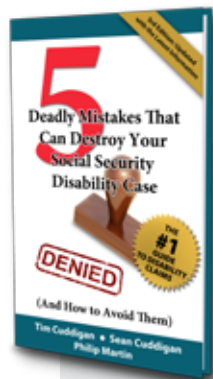
(Preventing Financial Abuse...continued from page 1.)

- A decline in physical health that can make the elder more dependent on others for transportation, home repairs or chores they previously did themselves, or personal care — all ways that someone with bad intentions can gain access to the person and their finances.
- Changes in legal paperwork, including power of attorney, will, property deed or automobile title, or additional names on bank accounts.

There are steps seniors and their families can take to prevent financial exploitation. *AARP.org* offers this advice:

- “When a person is still mentally sharp, help him or her make a plan that designates power of attorney and health care directives.
- Stay connected with older loved ones through regular phone calls, visits or emails.
- Develop a relationship with your parent’s caregiver. ‘They’ll be less likely to financially exploit Mother because they know you’re paying attention,’ [according to Bonnie Brandl, director of the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life.]
- Become a ‘trusted contact’ to monitor bank account and brokerage activity.
- Sign up for a service such as EverSafe to track financial activity and notify an advocate of unusual withdrawals or spending.
- Set up direct deposit for checks so others don’t have to cash them.

- Do not sign any documents that you don’t understand.”



“5 Deadly Mistakes That Can Destroy Your Social Security Disability Case” is the #1 guide to improving the odds of winning a disability case.

For a FREE copy for you or someone you care about call Cuddigan Law at 402.933.5318 or email us at lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com

White House Considering a Plan to Tighten Disability Eligibility

A proposal being kicked around in Washington would tighten eligibility requirements for Social Security disability benefits which could especially affect older Americans. Currently, to be eligible for benefits you must have an impairment which matches the medical criteria in the “Blue Book,” the Social Security Administration’s list of disabling conditions. If your symptoms match the requirements in the listings, you will likely qualify for disability payments. If your condition doesn’t meet that standard, age is the next qualification. Under the proposed new rules, age will play a less significant role in deciding if somebody is eligible for benefits.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that “[t]he proposal aims to address major economic and demographic shifts over the past four decades, according to the text of the draft rule. Americans are living longer and are better educated. Fewer people are engaged in physically demanding jobs in mines and factories, and more are working in offices, hospitals, schools and retail outlets. These shifts, plus jobs being added and subtracted by new technologies, change the potential work options for people with disabilities.”

Social Security disability programs have provided modest monthly payments to disabled American workers since 1956 with more than eight million Americans currently receiving disability benefits.



Comfort Food

From the kitchen of Janet Cuddigan

Sweet (but Healthy) Popcorn

Here’s an easy to make treat for movie nights in your living room. Your kids will love the sweet flavor and you’ll appreciate how healthy it is.

- 3 tablespoons coconut oil
- 3/4 cup popcorn kernels
- 2 tablespoons honey, or more to taste
- Salt to taste
- 1 pinch ground cinnamon, or more to taste



Heat coconut oil in a large pot over high heat. Drop 3 popcorn kernels into the hot oil and place a lid on the pot; cook until 1 kernel has popped. Remove the lid and pour in the

remaining popcorn. Return the lid to the pot and cook popcorn, shaking pot back and forth over burner, until there are 1 to 2 seconds between pops, about 5 minutes. Quickly transfer popcorn to a large bowl; evenly drizzle honey over popcorn. Add salt and cinnamon; toss popcorn with your hands to coat evenly.

Adapted from allrecipes.com

Grow Your Savings Account with Your Phone



Saving money is hard and statistics bear this out. According to Federal Reserve survey data only about 15% of Americans can come up with \$2,000 when faced with an emergency. However, your phone (yes, your phone) can make saving a bit easier. Here are three apps for saving money which are available for both Android and Apple IOS.

1. **Chime.** If you want your financial institution to just do it—take care of that saving thing—then Chime might be right for you. When you sign up you get an online checking and savings account. Whenever you buy something with your checking account Chime rounds up your purchase and dumps the extra change into your savings account. Cost of app: Free.

2. **Digit.** If you have a hard time figuring out how much you can afford to save and want your savings to happen more or less automatically, Digit is a good choice for a savings app. After you download the Digit app, you link your bank account and then set your savings goal. Digit will then analyze your income and how much you spend to come up with a reasonable figure of how much you can save. Cost of app: Free for the first 30 days and then \$5 a month.

3. **Qapital:** If you want to turn saving into a game, then give Qapital a whirl. You download the app, link it to your bank account, and establish a savings goal. After that the game kicks in. You can set Qapital to reward yourself with savings every time you accomplish a basic goal, like getting eight hours of sleep or completing that morning run. Or if you have a guilty pleasure like Starbucks, you can tell Qapital to transfer a buck into your savings account every time you buy a cup of joe. Cost of app: \$3 a month for the basic version after a 30-day free trial.

Brain Teaser



What comes once a minute, twice in a moment, but never in a thousand years?

For the brain teaser solution go to cuddiganlaw.com/library/newsletter

We’re in your corner.

We value the confidence and trust you have placed with us in the past.

If you or a family member or a friend could use our help now or in the future, please pass along our name.

Disability law is all we do.



Sean & Tim Cuddigan

Subscribe to the Cuddigan Law YouTube channel to view our free library of videos about Social Security and VA disability. You will find a full range of information about qualifying medical disorders, how-to tips on navigating the system, and insider advice on winning your claim.



Are you a disabled veteran?

Before you apply for VA disability benefits call Cuddigan Law at 402.933.5318 or email us at lawteam@cuddiganlaw.com for your FREE copy of our book *The Essential Guide to VA Disability Claims*.

