

IN DEBT? HELP YOURSELF OUT!

You can solve your problems by contacting the people you owe money to or the many organisations willing to help you — so get advice now. Here are a few tips that should help you get started.

Don't panic or ignore the problem: unopened bills won't go away.

You can get help from lots of organisations to sort out your debt problems (see over for details).

If you get a threatening letter get advice from your local Citizens Advice Bureau or trading standards service.

Decide which debts take priority – like mortgage or rent – and which cost you most through penalties or higher interest rates.

Work out a realistic budget that covers all your income and spending. Check whether there are any benefits or tax credits you are entitled to that you are not getting.

Only agree to pay off debts at a rate that you can keep up. Don't offer more than you can afford.

Get free advice – organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureaux can give free help (see over).

Contact those who you owe money to as soon as possible. Let them know that you are having problems. Many companies will be helpful if you talk to them.

If struggling with store or credit cards stop using them.

You can't ignore your debts. Better to pay a small amount than nothing at all – those you owe money to may be prepared to accept low repayments.

Keep copies of all letters you send and get about your debts.

If a debt collector calls at your home you don't have to let them in. If you want time to get advice arrange a later appointment.

If organisations won't accept your repayment offers, seek advice.

If a debt collector or lender harasses you contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau or trading standards service.

Think very carefully before borrowing more to pay off your debts. Get impartial advice and don't rush into signing anything you don't understand.

If you're thinking of taking out a new loan to pay off debts make sure you find out the total cost of the loan, not just the monthly repayments.

Debt: organisations that may be able to help

Check if a loan will be secured on your home. If it is and you do not keep up repayments you could lose your home. If you do not understand the terms of a loan get advice.

If you are thinking of using a fee charging debt management company, then make sure you understand exactly what you are signing up to.

Check what fees you will be paying to a debt management company and how long it will take you to pay off your debts.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential and impartial advice on debt. Details of your nearest bureau can be found in your local telephone directory.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Advice UK

(Were Federation of Information and Advice Centres)

A large network of advice providing organisations. Contact independent advice agencies through Advice UK at:

Advice UK, 12th Floor, New London Bridge House,
25 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9ST
Tel 020 7407 4070 (National)
Tel 020 7407 6611 (London)
www.adviceuk.org.uk

For agencies in Northern Ireland contact the
Association of Independent Advice Centres on
028 9064 5919
www.aiac.net

National Debtline

Free telephone helpline for people with debt problems in England, Scotland and Wales. More information at:

Tel 0808 808 4000
www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Consumer Credit Counselling Service

Provides free confidential service to help achieve realistic solutions to debt problems, avoid bankruptcy and learn to handle money. More information at:

Tel 0800 138 1111
www.cccs.co.uk

Money Advice Scotland

Provides contact details for free, impartial, independent and confidential money advisers throughout Scotland. Call 0141 572 0237

www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

Trading standards

Local trading standards services can take action when traders break consumer law.

If you want advice about whether a creditor or debt collector is acting unlawfully e.g. by harassing you, you may wish to contact trading standards. But they are unlikely to be able to provide you with debt or money advice.

Details of your local trading standards service can be found in your local telephone directory.

www.tradingstandards.gov.uk