

# SmartGuard Newsletter

## There's No Ageism in Identity Theft

### Crime is striking younger victims more frequently

Often, people conjure up an image of a frail elderly person being the victim of identity theft, either through a mugging, telephone scam, or other type of phishing scheme. But increasingly, it's young kids—even babies—who are being victimized. What's worse, usually no is the wiser until years later, at which time the child's credit is in ruin.

### Good Targets

According to the Federal Trade Commission, more than 500,000 children have their identities stolen each year. They also estimate the percentage of identity theft victims under the age of eighteen is up by nearly 40% in recent years.

Children are easy targets for two main reasons. First, their credit is unblemished, making opening and establishing accounts in their good name a breeze for savvy thieves. Second, since parents rarely check their child's credit reports, the crime often goes undetected until the child is of age—giving criminals ample time to rack up enormous bills.

Clearly, thieves are having a field day with data stolen from children. So what's a concerned parent to do?

### Get Proactive

The best thing you can do to keep your child's identity safe is to be proactive in protecting it. Here's how:

- Maintain privacy. Many schools, doctors, and sports teams ask for a copy of a child's birth certificate and social security number. Ask if either or both are absolute requirements for participation. If not, do not give out this sensitive information. If yes, ask how this data will be safeguarded from scammers—and provide it only upon receiving a satisfactory answer.
- Do not carry Social Security cards. This goes for you and your children, your cards and theirs. Better to lock Social Security cards away for safekeeping, and only take them out when absolutely necessary.
- Shred it. Shred any document with your child's personal information on it instead of disposing of it in the garbage or recycling.
- Request credit reports annually. Since children do not yet have a financial history, your child's report should have nothing on it. Any activity could indicate identity theft.
- Contact Social Security. Run a check against your child's name and Social Security number each year to ensure there is no work history record.

### Keeping Childhood Identity Theft in Check

Getting a driver's license. A college loan. That first job and apartment. No parent wants their child's important "firsts" to come with the nasty surprise of long-term identity theft—but without proper safeguards and checks in place, it is a real and growing possibility. By following the suggestions above, as well as considering fraud protection for the entire family, you can rest assured your child's good name will remain intact.

### Know the Warning Signs

Receiving the following in your child's name may be signs of identity theft:

Numerous credit card offers

A barrage of telemarketing calls

Bills and/or past due notices

Social Security statements reporting wage earnings

If any of the above happens, it is your signal to begin investigating whether your child's personal data has been compromised.