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Overview

We appreciate that the first step of making contact for free debt advice is a big one and can feel overwhelming. We developed this guide to help you understand the role of the debt adviser and what to expect when you meet us.

Introductions

- Your debt adviser is experienced at making you feel comfortable and putting you at ease, we are a friendly bunch with shared visions to help people out of debt.
- Our profession is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, we are usually trained to a very high standard (www.i-m-a.org.uk/learning-development/certificate-money-advice-practice).

Please do ask us about your debt adviser's qualifications and experience, checking these can be very reassuring as well as checking that you are dealing with a regulated firm.

- We never judge why you are in debt or what you have or have not done to sort your debt problems.
- A lot of debt advisers have had personal experiences with debt and have been drawn to the

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profession as a result, we are likely to know exactly how you are feeling, the gut wrench in the pit of your stomach when the phone rings and when the next unpaid bill hits the door mat, perhaps even the loud knock at the door. All of these can be terrifying.

Sharing your information with a Debt Adviser

- We apologise in advance, we ask a lot of questions about you and your finances but we do this for very good reasons; to make a full fact-finding assessment of how we can help you best.
- Your information is completely confidential, we will not share anything about you without your permission. Please read Money Advice Hub's privacy notice for more info (drive.google.com/file/d/1lwP9g8jGe2fl2gYXKDx7OMrrjcVt4_U/view).
- We are often told things of a very personal nature and will always be sensitive and practical with this information. We might encourage you to share sensitive information if we think it will help create better understanding with your creditors. Please take a look at our Debt and Mental Health fact sheet.
- Your detailed household and/or personal budget is a really important part of the debt advice process, we must make sure it is as accurate as it can be before going through your debt options. You might find your debt adviser needs to create different budget versions, this is because your everyday finances often change at different parts of the year.
- Debt Advisers will ask you about your priority and non-priority debts.
- Due to our regulation and some of the external organisations that we deal with, we do need to verify some of your documentation and personal information. It is really important that you get these to us asap because delays can cause your debt position to worsen. We will always try to make it as easy as possible to get info to us, such as using free scanning apps and free apps to send image files, such as WhatsApp.
- We record your enquiry information and what advice we have given on secure case management systems to make sure we always know where we are with your case enquiry.

Discussing Debt Options

- Debt Advisers explain how to deal with your debts and your creditors to get the best outcomes. In most cases, you will be encouraged to contact your creditors to let them know your situation and you will be advised about default notices and the effect on your credit score. In some cases, we may advise you not to contact old debts that are more than a few years old until we have worked out whether you have liability to repay them.

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- Money Advice Hub provides an online Debt Advice Passport to communicate with creditors simply and whenever you need to because debts often change ownership to debt collection agencies during the collection process:

www.moneyadvicehub.org.uk/debtlopedia/advice-and-information-debtlopedia/debt-advice/resources-tools/debt-advice-passport

- If you have not done so already, we will suggest you request breathing space with your creditors.
- Once we have dealt with any emergency debt problems and we have a full fact-finding assessment, we will discuss your debt options.
- We will outline the pros and cons of debt solutions and also look at other debt strategies, such as charitable grants, extended breathing space, income maximisation etc.

Confirmation of Advice & Support

- Your debt adviser will confirm in writing all the options and advice discussed with you, this includes what you have agreed to do next and how this will be achieved.
- You will be advised whether there are any application fees involved in your debt strategy and how these will be paid. You will also be informed of any charges that external referral organisations might charge, if any.
- Some debt advisers will recommend a debt option to you and some will not, this will depend on their organisation's policy. The most important thing for you to do is to make sure it is the right debt option for you, it must be appropriate to your circumstances, affordable within your budget and maintainable, i.e. futureproof.
- Further appointments might be required before applying for formal debt solutions or your information might be passed on to another referral organisation with your consent.
- Your debt adviser will outline the things you need to do. Specialist debt advisers very rarely have administrative support, it is really important that you make every effort to work with your debt adviser for the quickest outcomes.
- Once you are in a stable financial position, your enquiry is closed by your debt adviser but your information is usually stored for a minimum of 6 years. It is handy to know that information is available to you in case of future queries but your debt adviser will always encourage you to keep your own records as well.

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- When you are finally out of debt, you might feel a bit on your own and wondering what is next? Many debt advice agencies offer financial capability services that can advise you how to plan and manage your future finances, it is worth asking what help is available.

You can also read our fact sheet 'How to improve your credit score' and visit free information sites, such as the Money Advice Service (www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en) and Money Saving Expert (www.moneysavingexpert.com).



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