

Can't pay your mortgage?

Help is at hand.

Practical advice on paying your mortgage, from the Building Societies Association and the Money Advice Trust.

 **Building Societies Association**

MONEY
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BUSINESS
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DEBTLINE WISER
ADVISER



Can't pay your mortgage?

Having problems paying your mortgage can be one of the most stressful financial situations that anyone has to deal with. However, contrary to popular belief, lenders don't want to repossess your home as soon as you can't meet your monthly repayments. An unexpected change in circumstances can often be the cause of someone falling behind with their payments. Lenders know this and want to help.

We are in an environment where interest rates are likely to rise. This rise will mean that most borrowers will see an increase in their monthly mortgage repayments unless they have a fixed rate mortgage, because, as the base rate rises so do mortgage rates. Those who already have a tight budget may find this especially difficult to manage.

Whether you are already facing a squeeze or think you are going to when rates go up, help is available.

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Thank you so much! It's a huge relief and your early support has been magnificent. I am immensely grateful to you for allowing me the time and space to resolve issues and the friendly non-judgemental way in which you have maintained contact.

Cambridge Building Society, customer feedback 2014

Six simple steps

1 **Contact your lender early**

As soon as you think you will have a problem with your monthly mortgage repayment; whether you can't pay anything, can't pay all of your monthly payment or can't pay it on time, get in touch with your lender straight away. The earlier you start talking to each other the more likely it is that a solution can be found. The same applies if your lender gets in touch with you – please don't ignore them, pick up the phone or make an appointment to see them. Your lender wants to help you to stay in your home.

2 **Assess your situation**

Have you worked out a household budget? If you haven't, creating one may make a big difference. You should work out what you have coming in, how much money you are spending and on what. It makes sense to prioritise payment of your essential household bills like your mortgage, other loans secured on your home, council tax, fuel bills and food. There are lots of budget planners available online which you can use as the framework for your budget. Also check out the National Debtline budget online.

You may be able to reschedule your unsecured loans, credit cards or other types of credit or make reduced offers of payment to your creditors. Lenders will work with you and your debt adviser to explore these options.

With interest rates likely to go up, it is worth checking how much difference this will make to your monthly repayments now. There are a lot of mortgage calculators on the internet. Look at the difference a number of interest rate increases would make, for example, 0.25%, 0.5%, 1% and 1.5%, but don't forget that rates are likely to go up gradually.

Are you getting all the help that's available to you? For example are you eligible for any government support such as benefits or tax credits that you aren't claiming? Have you spoken to one of the free debt advice services?

3 **Keep in contact**

No matter what actions you are taking, keep your lender up-to-date about your financial situation. Be honest about it, tell them what you are doing and let them know if there are further changes to your circumstances.

4 **Show that you are willing to pay what you can**

Your lender may agree to reduce your monthly repayments. However, you should make sure that you keep paying this smaller amount regularly and on time. If something happens which means you can't pay, tell your lender immediately. When you are arranging a reduced repayment be realistic. It won't help your situation if you agree to a payment that you are unlikely to be able to pay from the start. Your mortgage should be a priority to pay before any other debts you may have.

5 **Explore all your options**

Lenders take action to repossess someone's home as a last resort. Long before they even think about this they have a range of tools which can be used to help. What is suitable for one person might not be for another – discuss your options with your lender.

If you are worried that you might not be able to afford your mortgage repayment if the interest rate goes up, talk to your lender about whether a switch to a fixed-rate mortgage would be the right option. Your lender will advise you.

6 **Take advice from trusted sources**

Make sure you take advice only from people who have the relevant expertise. Your lender will be able to help, and you can also get free, independent advice from organisations like National Debtline, Citizens Advice, Shelter and other free, independent debt advisers. Be very wary of organisations offering solutions that appear to be too good to be true – they probably are.

Be especially wary of "sale and rent back" companies that offer to sell your house very quickly for less than the market value – you may only get a guarantee that you can live there for six months, and you may lose housing and other benefits too.

So, calling your lender isn't going to trigger the repossession of your home. In fact, quite the opposite – your lender will work with you to do whatever they can to keep you in your home.

Contacting your lender

You should find that you get a helpful response from the people who work in dedicated teams, often called arrears departments, which have been set up to help people with repayment difficulties.

Lenders' arrears departments are often open for longer hours than other teams, sometimes including evenings and weekends. This means that customers can get advice when it suits them – no one wants to call their lender to talk about arrears from work when they could have that conversation at home, in the evening or over the weekend.

When you contact your lender, they will look at your household budget – what is coming in and what is going out – and agree a plan with you for managing your mortgage arrears. If you are also working with an independent debt adviser they can be involved in this process too.



Lenders have a range of options, including the following:

- Creating a new repayment plan.
- Reducing your monthly payments by increasing the term of the loan.
- Temporarily moving a repayment mortgage on to an interest-only basis.
- Adding the arrears to the outstanding mortgage amount rather than asking for immediate payment.
- Accepting reduced payments for a limited time until you are able to start making your full payments again and put a plan in place to repay any arrears.
- Changing the way you make your payments, or the date you make them.

The options available will depend on your individual circumstances and not every option will be suitable for you.

The Financial Conduct Authority, the body which regulates all mortgage lenders, states that firms must treat customers in financial difficulty fairly and this is exactly what you can expect from your lender.

Who are the debt advisers?

They are organisations that give consumers independent, impartial debt advice. Debt advice is available free-of-charge through face-to-face services, telephone helplines and online. Expert advisers can help to put you back in control of your finances.

Some are generalist agencies offering debt advice alongside a range of other support services. Other agencies only offer debt advice. Some debt advisers are paid employees, others are volunteers.

Here are a few examples:

- Face-to-face services, like your local Citizens Advice Bureau and local authorities.
- Independent telephone helplines, such as National Debtline (0800 808 4000).
- Comprehensive online services, such as www.nationaldebtline.org
- Other charities like Shelter and StepChange Debt Charity.
- Information is also available from the Money Advice Service which co-ordinates debt advice.



Your staff were non-judgmental, knowledgeable and very helpful. I can sleep at night now.

Client feedback, National Debtline 2013, Money Advice Trust

What can a debt adviser do for you?

They can:

- Help you work out your income and expenditure and complete your personal/household budget.
- Find out whether you are entitled to extra income such as benefits, tax credits or tax allowances – extra income that can help repay your debts.
- Look at options to deal with your debts and work out how much money you have available to pay them each month.
- Check whether you are actually responsible for the debts you are being asked to pay. Is the debt in your name? Do you owe the amount that is being asked for?
- Make sure that the most important debts are paid first – some debts are more important than others. The law gives different creditors different ways of getting their money back. These are called priority debts. It is important to make offers of payment on priority debts such as mortgages and secured loans first.

A number of inaccurate 'urban myths' have developed about what to do if you can't pay your mortgage.

Here are some of the most common ones:

Myth The only way I can pay off my arrears is to pay off the whole amount I owe.

Fact Your lender will offer you a range of options to repay your arrears, and you won't be expected to do it in one go.

Myth I could take a loan out to pay off my arrears.

Fact Many companies claim to be able to consolidate debts or to offer low payment loans to deal with your arrears. However, the interest charged on such arrangements can often be high. You should always take independent advice before thinking about taking out a new loan. Don't forget that if the loan is secured on your home, it will put your house at risk if you cannot keep up the payments.

Myth I could send my keys back to the lender and walk away.

Fact Doing this does not end the mortgage as the monthly payments, interest and charges will keep being added to the debt until the house is sold. You would also still be liable for any money that you owed your lender after the house was sold. Also, don't forget that you will need somewhere to live, and your local authority may view you as having made yourself voluntarily homeless and may decide they are unable to help you.

Further advice and help

AdviceUK

020 7469 5700 or visit www.adviceuk.org.uk

Advice NI

028 9064 5919 or visit www.adviceni.net

(only in Northern Ireland)

Business Debtline

0800 197 6026 or visit www.businessdebtline.org

Citizens Advice Bureau

Details of individual CABs are available at:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk for England and Wales

www.cas.org.uk for Scotland

www.citizensadvice.co.uk for Northern Ireland

Civil Legal Advice

0845 345 4 345 or visit www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice

Local authorities

Some offer an in-house debt advice service.

Money Advice Scotland

www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

Money Advice Service

0300 500 5000 or visit www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

National Debtline

0808 808 4000 or visit www.nationaldebtline.org

Payplan

0800 085 4298 or visit www.payplan.com

Shelter

0808 800 4444 or visit www.shelter.org.uk/adviceonline

StepChange Debt Charity

0800 138 1111 or visit www.stepchange.org

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mortgage lender home help advice

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The Building Societies Association (BSA)
is the voice of building societies in the UK.
www.bsa.org.uk

The Money Advice Trust (MAT) is a charity
formed in 1991 to help people across the
UK to tackle their debts and manage their
money wisely. The Trust also runs
National Debtline and Business Debtline.
www.moneyadvice Trust.org

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