

Questions and Answers about Financial Choice

1. What is Financial Choice?

Financial Choice is a partnership between the University of Minnesota and LSS Financial Counseling. With Financial Choice employees and their family members are eligible for up to six free sessions with a certified financial counselor for any of the service types. Sessions can be in person, by phone, or online.

Have a quick question or immediate concern and aren't sure if you need a full appointment? We also have a Counselor on Call, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., to help get your questions answered.

2. Is LSS Financial Counseling a safe place to go for help?

LSS is a member agency of the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC), which is the “gold standard” for reputable nonprofit financial counseling. Our counselors are trained and certified in credit counseling, housing counseling, foreclosure prevention, and reverse mortgage counseling, depending on their specialty. A program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, our mission is to help people gain control of their finances and achieve financial wellness. We've been helping people in your community overcome debt since 1987. We can help you too.

3. Is the financial counseling confidential?

Yes. Your information shared with LSS Financial Counseling remains private under the same state and federal laws that keep any medical or counseling record private. LSS does share overall utilization numbers with the University but never any client names or any identifying information.

4. When is the right time to get help? Do I need to be in trouble with finances to qualify for this service?

You do not have to be in financial trouble to use Financial Choice. LSS Financial Counselors are available to help you find tools and solutions for your finances including, but not limited to: reducing debt; improving credit; budgeting for life events like marriage, having a baby, or moving into your own apartment; and reaching your goals through strategic savings.

Of course, if you do find yourself with a financial challenge you can't overcome on your own you can be assured that meeting with an LSS Financial Counselor through Financial Choice is safe and confidential. Our counselors have helped thousands of families to stabilize their finances and get out of debt. They can help you take control as well.

5. Are all of your services free for University of Minnesota employees?

All University of Minnesota employees can have up to six free sessions of financial counseling, whether that focuses on debt, budgeting, credit report review, or housing counseling. The only two exceptions are: 1) court-required bankruptcy counseling and education [employees would self-pay for these since they are part of the court filing process and require a certificate] and 2) monthly debt management consolidation plans [employees would self-pay the monthly service fee, and LSS would waive the one-time set-up fee].

6. What is a Debt Management Plan (DMP) and how does it help with credit card debt?

LSS can help you make an action plan for all of your debts, but it's hard to beat a DMP for rapid repayment of credit cards. A debt management plan consolidates your credit card debt into one monthly payment to creditors through LSS. Most creditors will then offer lower interest rates and stop any late fees so you'll have faster debt repayment. DMPs are paid off within five years or less. There is a monthly service fee based on the size of your payment, but LSS waives the DMP set-up fee for University of Minnesota employees.



7. What can a foreclosure prevention counselor do if I'm worried about my mortgage payments?

Our HUD-certified housing counselors can offer guidance on renting, buying, or owning a home, including rights and options to prevent foreclosure. LSS housing counselors will review your financial picture and provide realistic options such as helping you advocate with your mortgage company or access programs to help homeowners.

8. My student loans just went into repayment. Can Financial Choice help me with those?

Whether your loans have just gone into repayment, have defaulted, or you have been carrying them for years, our student loan team will help you figure out what types of student loans you have; what repayment options are available to you; if consolidation makes sense for you; and make a plan to get your student loans paid off.

9. I worry about having enough for retirement. What kind of help can this service offer?

Financial Choice counselors can help with almost any aspect of personal finance—building a good credit score, debt reduction, money management, and budgeting tips. They do not offer legal or investment advice, but can help you with the basics like how to find money in your budget to save more for retirement, thinking about how to budget in retirement, or building financial confidence in thinking about retirement plans.

10. My spouse/partner and I don't agree about finances. Can Financial Choice help us get on the same page?

Many couples have a difficult time talking about money and getting on the same page. Our Financial Choice counselors can help you set goals and explore different tools and strategies for managing your money and reaching your financial goals together.