

# Am I really in a relationship?

**Centrelink will want to know whether you're single or in a relationship because that affects how much money you can get.**

You have 14 days to let Centrelink know if someone moves in with you. They may ask you to fill out a Relationship Details form to get an idea of your relationship with that person.

Centrelink can say you're a couple from the day you move in together. If Centrelink says you're in a relationship but you don't think that's right, ring us for advice.

## What happens if I don't tell Centrelink about my partner?

If you don't tell Centrelink that you live with your partner, you may be paid too much and you'll have to pay it back. If there is a lot of money involved and Centrelink thinks you didn't tell them on purpose, you could also be criminally charged.

If you are worried about this happening, please give us a call straight away for legal advice. Everything you tell us is completely confidential. As a legal practice we have a strict duty of confidentiality.

## How does Centrelink decide?

Centrelink can look at whether you might be in a relationship, even if you don't think you are. They call that deciding whether you're a 'member of a couple'.

Centrelink will try to gather as much information about you as possible. They might look at things like:

- How you use your money
- How you live in your house
- Whether friends, family and others think you're in a relationship
- Whether you have a sexual relationship
- Whether you help and support each other

You can find out more about how Centrelink considers relationships from this useful factsheet on Economic Justice Australia's website at [www.ejaustralia.org.au](http://www.ejaustralia.org.au).

## What if my partner isn't giving me any support or always causes problems?

Sometimes a person's relationship is so difficult that they shouldn't be considered a 'member of a couple'. That can include situations of domestic violence where you don't get any financial or emotional support from your partner.

It can also include situations where:

- You don't know about your partner's financial situation
- Your partner won't let you tell Centrelink about them or their work
- Your partner is controlling or taking your Centrelink payments
- Your partner is threatening to report you to Centrelink if you leave
- You want to leave your partner

We understand that it's tough without enough money to live on so it can be difficult to work out what to do. It's important that you contact us for advice rather than hide information from Centrelink. Everything you tell us is confidential.

## Do I have to tell Centrelink about my partner's income?

If you are a member of a couple, your partner's income will affect the type of payments you can get from Centrelink and how much you can get. For most payments you will need to report your partner's income every fortnight.

You'll also need to make sure you report both your and your partner's 'annual income' for Family Tax Benefit.

## What if I separate from my partner?

If you separate from your partner, you should tell Centrelink as soon as possible so you can get the single rate straight away. If you don't tell them straight away, you may not get back paid.

## What should I do if I'm being investigated?

Anything you discuss with Centrelink can be used against you, but Centrelink can't force you to talk so we might advise you not to attend any meetings or interviews.

If you're being investigated, it's very important you get legal advice before you talk to Centrelink.

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You can contact us for free advice through our website at [www.welfarerights.org.au](http://www.welfarerights.org.au)  
Or call us on 02 9211 5300 or 1800 226 028 - Monday or Wednesday, 9:30am to 12:30pm

Welfare Rights Centre is a community legal centre that helps people who have a problem with Centrelink. We specialise in social security law and family assistance law, including the intersection of child support and social security payments.

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