EMERGENCY CHECKLIST ⚠

THE FIRST 48 HOURS

STOP THE PANIC. START THE PLAN.

4 CHECKLISTS	PRIORITY ORDER	RISK DIAGRAM	HOUR-BY-HOUR PLAN

DON'T WAIT. DON'T GUESS. TAKE ACTION.

Crush-Debt

48 HOURS CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING.

CHECKLIST 1

The first 48 hours

You don't need to do this perfectly. You need to start. Check off each item as you complete it.

- [ ] **Write down every debt you have**, even from memory, it doesn't need to be exact. Who you owe, roughly how much, how far behind.
- [ ] **Check the real deadlines** on any collection notices you've received, legal timelines are almost always longer than you fear.
- [ ] **Set aside this month's essential money**, rent/mortgage, utilities, food, mentally separate it from everything else.
- [ ] **Don't answer collector calls on impulse**, write down the number and call back when you're ready.
- [ ] **Mute your banking notifications** that only fuel anxiety without giving you anything useful.
- [ ] **Prepare one sentence** to use if someone asks about your situation, you don't owe everyone an explanation.
- [ ] **Identify one person you trust** to tell, you don't have to face this completely alone.
- [ ] **Gather the documents you'll need**, see the dedicated checklist on page 6.
- [ ] **Freeze all new credit card or installment purchases** for the next 48 hours, no exceptions.
- [ ] **Put tomorrow's first call to a creditor on your calendar**, pick the time now, not "whenever you feel ready."

CHECKLIST 1B

Worksheet: my debts, right now

Five minutes, rough numbers are enough to start. You'll use this list on the next page.

CREDITOR	APPROX. AMOUNT	NEXT DUE DATE
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Don't have exact numbers for all of them? Write your best estimate. You can correct it later, you can't act on a list that doesn't exist yet.

CHECKLIST 2

Who to contact first

Not every creditor has the same urgency. Follow this order, not the order they contact you in.

Before you pay or promise anything on an old debt

Every state sets a time limit, the statute of limitations, after which a creditor can no longer sue you to collect. In most states it runs somewhere between three and six years, and the clock is usually measured from your last payment or written acknowledgment of the debt. Making a partial payment, or signing something that admits you owe it, can restart that clock from zero and revive a debt that was no longer enforceable. If a debt is more than three years old, look up your state's limit before you pay or agree to anything on it.

1. **Anyone threatening legal action or wage garnishment**
   Top priority. Handle within 24-48 hours.

2. **The creditor with the highest interest rate**
   It's the one growing your debt the fastest.

3. **Essential utilities (electric, gas, water)**
   Never let these lapse, a shutoff costs more time and money than a payment plan.

4. **Small-balance credit cards**
   These often close quickly with a simple agreement, useful early wins for momentum.

5. **Fixed-rate personal loans**
   Usually the most willing to renegotiate terms with you.

6. **Financing for non-essential purchases**
   Lowest priority, unless you're facing a direct legal threat.

TIMELINE

Your hour-by-hour plan

You don't have to do everything at once. Here's when to do what.

Hour 0-2

Get the numbers down

Fill in the debt list on page 3. Set aside this month's essential money. Stop, don't decide anything else yet.

Hour 2-6

Freeze new spending

Freeze new card or installment purchases. Mute banking notifications that only fuel anxiety. Identify one person you trust to tell.

Hour 6-24

Get ready to talk

Gather the documents on page 6. Prepare the one sentence you'll use if someone asks. Check real deadlines on any notices you've received.

Hour 24-48

Make the first call

Contact creditor #1 from your priority order on page 4. You don't need to resolve everything today, you need to make one call.

CHECKLIST 3

Documents to prepare

Having these ready before any call or meeting saves time and makes you look credible.

- [ ] Bank statements from the last 3 months
- [ ] Pay stubs or income documentation from the last 3 months
- [ ] A copy of every active loan or financing agreement
- [ ] Collection notices or demand letters received, with dates
- [ ] Photo ID
- [ ] A list of monthly fixed expenses (rent, utilities, childcare/school costs)
- [ ] Any communication already exchanged with creditors (emails, certified letters)

Never give your Social Security number over the phone unless you placed the call yourself, to a number you verified independently.

CHECKLIST 4

What to NEVER do with a debt collector

You're at your weakest when you don't know these six rules. Now you do.

First, know who you're talking to

The federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) covers third-party debt collectors and collection agencies, the companies that buy or are hired to collect someone else's debt. It generally does not cover an original creditor collecting its own account, so your own bank or card issuer is usually outside it. Several states, including California, extend similar protections to original creditors too. Ask any caller, in writing, whether they are the original creditor or a collector, the answer changes which rights apply.

- Don't promise an amount or date you're not sure you can meet, a broken agreement makes your position worse.
- Don't agree to anything over the phone, always ask for written confirmation before accepting any deal.
- Don't ignore written communications, even a minimal response protects you legally.
- Never share more financial information than what's strictly needed for that specific agreement.
- Don't let aggressive tones intimidate you, you can end any call and call back when you're ready. If the caller is a third-party collector, the FDCPA also lets you tell them in writing to stop contacting you.
- Don't pay quickly just to relieve anxiety, request debt validation in writing first. With a third-party collector you have **30 days from their first communication** to dispute the debt and demand verification, and collection must pause until they send it. Don't let that window lapse.

ESCALATION

When to get help immediately

Most of this checklist is something you can handle yourself. These four situations are not. Don't try to negotiate these alone.

You've been served with a lawsuit

There are strict deadlines to respond, often 20-30 days depending on your state. Missing it can mean an automatic judgment against you. Contact a local legal aid clinic or attorney immediately.

Wage garnishment has started or been threatened with a court order

This usually means a judgment already exists. A consultation can clarify whether it can still be contested or reduced.

You've received an eviction or foreclosure notice

Housing has its own legal timelines and tenant or homeowner protections that vary by state. Get qualified local guidance before the hearing date, not after.

A vehicle repossession is scheduled

If you need the car for work, there is often a narrow window to negotiate reinstatement before pickup. Call the lender directly and ask about it today.

Free and low-cost help, worth knowing before you need it

NFCC (National Foundation for Credit Counseling) connects you to nonprofit credit counselors, first sessions are typically free. **Dial 211** for local emergency assistance with rent, utilities and food. **LawHelp.org** lists free legal aid by state. None of these charge upfront fees, if someone asks you to pay before doing anything, walk away.

None of this is legal advice. It's a signal for when this checklist has done its job and it's time to bring in someone qualified.

DIAGRAM

What's your risk level?

Answer in order. Stop at the first "yes".

Have you received a formal notice or a threat of legal action / wage garnishment?

If yes → you're at Level 1. See the box below.

Level 1, Act within 24 hours

Contact the creditor or a professional today. Don't wait until tomorrow.

Are you more than two consecutive payments behind?

If yes → you're at Level 2. See the box below.

Level 2, Act this week

Follow the entire checklist in order, starting on page 2.

Neither of the above?

You're at Level 3.

Level 3, You have room, but start now

The right time to act isn't next month. It's now, while you still have choices.

Finished the checklist. Now what?

This was the emergency response. The complete 30-day method, negotiation scripts, a payment plan, priority order for every debt, is in the full Crush-Debt program.