

Keeping the lights on

If you're having difficulties paying a gas or electricity bill, it's vital that you contact your retailer to let them know about the problem. Before doing so, think about your situation and decide what type of assistance you need and what payment amount and schedule you can afford.

If you need to negotiate a bill extension, organise to repay a debt, or figure out ongoing payments – for example via a payment arrangement – phone the retailer's call centre. If you have ongoing financial or personal problems that make it difficult to manage bills on a regular basis, ask for the hardship team.

(All energy retailers have specialist hardship teams to help households with ongoing affordability problems manage their energy use, reduce their bills, and affordably pay for ongoing usage and repay debt.)

Energy retailers will offer flexibility to customers who need it, but they rely on customers identifying themselves as experiencing bill payment difficulty: so it's vitally important that you let them know there's a problem, and tell them exactly what you can afford to pay. Otherwise you may end up on an unaffordable payment plan that leads to increased debt or possible disconnection. Where the bill payment difficulty is likely to be ongoing, you should ask directly about hardship programs.



Energy retailer phone numbers

AGL 131 245

Australian Power & Gas 133 298

Click Energy 1800 775 929

Country Energy 132 356

Dodo Power & Gas 133 636

Energy Australia 131 562

Lumo Energy 1300 115 866

Momentum Energy 1300 662 778

Neighbourhood Energy 1300 764 860

Origin Energy 132 461

Powerdirect 1300 307 966

Red Energy 131 806

Simply Energy 138 808

TRUenergy 133 466

Other useful phone numbers

Energy and Water Ombudsman
Victoria (EWOV)
1800 500 509

Concessions Unit
(Department of Human Services)
1800 658 521

No disconnection

All households have rights that protect them from disconnection if they can't afford to pay a bill, and ensure that retailers follow proper processes when considering disconnection. If a retailer disconnects without following proper processes, the household is eligible for compensation for wrongful disconnection.

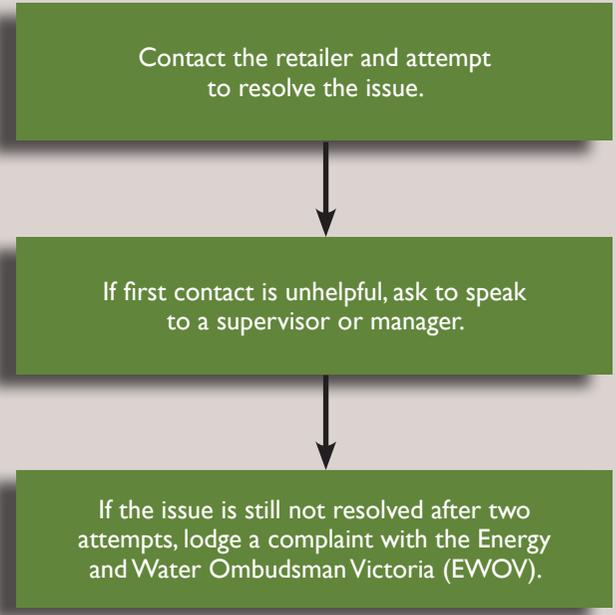
Proper process includes making reasonable attempts to contact the customer, giving adequate notice of disconnection, and (for dual fuel contracts) not disconnecting electricity and gas at the same time.

Additionally, households cannot be disconnected if:

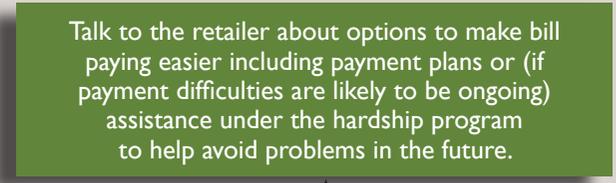
- It's a Friday, the weekend, the day before a public holiday or after 2pm on a weekday;
- They're currently participating in a retailer's hardship program or complying with a payment plan;
- They have not been offered a second payment plan (if they have defaulted on their first);
- They've applied for a Utility Relief Grant that hasn't yet been decided on;
- They've complained to EWOV about the reason they're being disconnected and it has not been resolved; or
- Someone in the house requires life support equipment.

Further detailed information for community support workers on helping households having difficulties with electricity and gas bills can be found in *Energy Hardship: a guide for agencies* at bit.ly/hardshipguide

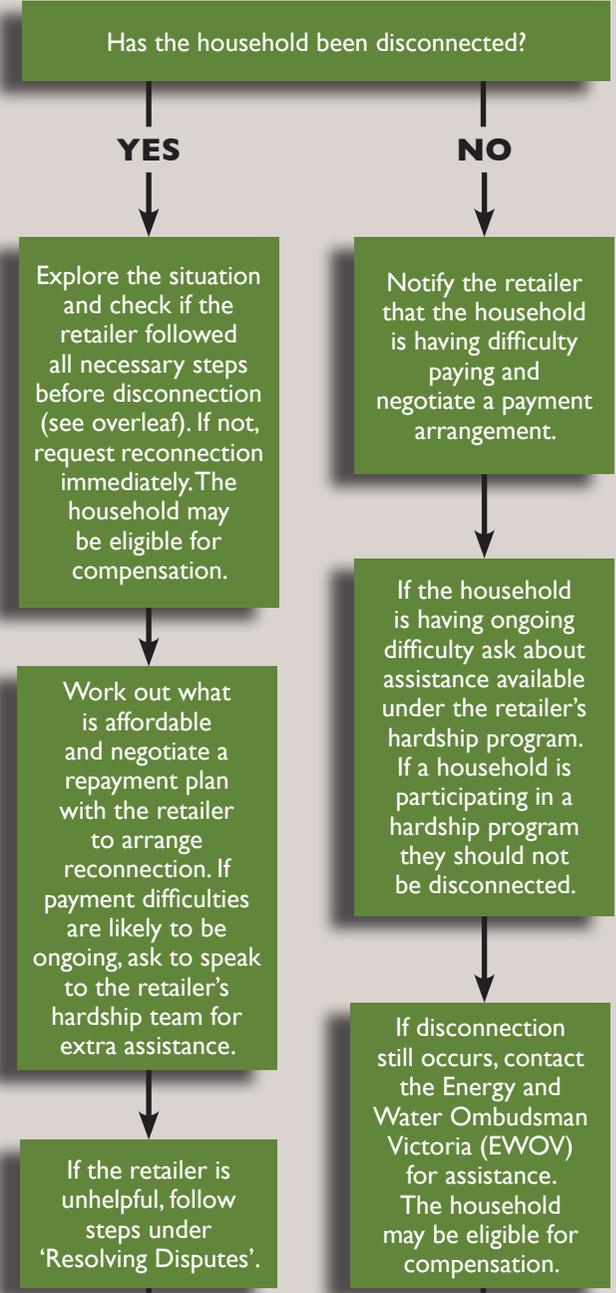
Resolving disputes



Ongoing affordability



Disconnection for non-payment



Unable to pay a bill

