

Before hiring a financial adviser, here are some tips to follow:

- Decide what you want from a financial adviser. Are you looking for investment or estate-planning advice? Saving for retirement? Financing a child's college education? Defining your goals will make it easier to find an adviser who meets your needs.
- Ask people you trust for recommendations. Your family, friends, accountant, lawyer or banker may be able to help.
- Interview several advisers before making a decision. Most won't charge for an initial consultation.
- When you interview an adviser, bring a list of questions and write down the answers. If you have problems or disagreements later, you'll have a record of what was said.
- Check the background of the firm or individual with the Iowa Insurance Division at 877-955-1212.

Once you've selected an adviser, insist upon a written contract or letter that outlines the services you expect and the adviser's commissions or fees. Monitor your investments by reviewing your monthly statements to make sure your money is going where the adviser says it is. That's the best defense against fraud.