

Teach Children About Money

Children who learn to manage money at an early age are better able to make financial decisions later in life. As they become more savvy spenders, they also are less likely to constantly ask their parents for money.

Giving children an allowance generally is a good way to start the teaching process. An allowance is different than occasional spending money. It is actually a share of the family's resources. An allowance works best when it is given regularly, like a pay check because it helps children learn to plan expenditures.

Parents often ask how old a child should be before receiving an allowance, but there is not a one-size-fits-all age that can be recommended. Parents are encouraged to watch for signs. When a child begins to understand that money affords purchasing power, they usually are good candidates for a beginning allowance. Children often reach this stage by age four or five.

The amount of an allowance is best determined by considering a child's age and the resources available. Discussing—and agreeing on—what the allowance is expected to cover also is essential. For example, a beginning allowance for a five-year-old might be expected to cover the costs of a book, toy, or snack-of-choice. A teenager's allowance might cover the cost of school supplies, personal grooming products, clothing, gifts for friends, and entertainment.

As a child grows, needs expand and allowances usually increase accordingly. Parents and children should discuss what the allowance is expected to cover—and when to give a raise. Such discussions are important to the learning process because it teaches them to plan for necessary expenses.

Parents are encouraged to suggest spending options to guide children through the decision-making process, but should not make a spending decision for the child.

Developing decision-making skills is essential to money management, and the skills transfer to other aspects of life, too.

Should parents rush to the rescue?

If a needed expense is time sensitive, like museum admission for a field trip, it can be consider a loan. It should, however, be a loan and not a gift, because it is important for children to learn that if they need to borrow money, they also need to work out a plan to repay the loan.

What if the allowance is not enough?

A high-ticket item often provides an opportunity to encourage saving. This is an important lesson for young spenders to learn because major purchases are a necessary part of life.

How can parents encourage children to save?

Younger children can be encouraged to save a portion of their allowance for a special or unexpected purchases like a book, or souvenir on an upcoming trip. As children grow older and begin to understand that savings earn interest, bank accounts offering benefits to young savers can be appealing. And, as funds accumulate, children often need less encouragement.

Financial stresses can begin at an early age. Many advertising and marketing campaigns target children, and there also is pressure from peers to have specific products or brands. While teaching children about money will not eliminate such pressures, it can help parents guide children to view financial expectations more realistically.

Katey Walker

Plan Kids' Snacks

Kids need snacks. Their stomachs are small, so they need to eat more frequently. Set aside a spot where children know they can find healthy snacks, such as cheese and crackers, fresh fruit and/or vegetables with a low-fat dip, or cereal and milk. For growing children, offer at least one snack food that includes calcium. After-school snacks should be offered two hours before mealtime to avoid spoiling children's appetites.

Kathy Walsten

PARENTS CORNER

Sensory Awareness

Children learn about the world by touching, tasting, smelling, hearing, and seeing. To young children, the world is brand new. They explore this world through their senses. We can help this process by providing materials for children to explore, within safe limits, and encouraging them to be aware of their environment.

Take a “sight-seeing, sight-hearing, sight-feeling” sensory walk with your children. Watch a squirrel gather nuts; smell wild flowers; hear the birds singing in the trees; feel the textures of leaves; eat a tasty snack in a special place. Listen for both familiar and unfamiliar sounds. Be sure to point out that some things are dangerous to smell and eat.

*Excerpt from The Parents' Page, Vol. 2, No. 5,
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What Did You Do Right Today?

We can be our own worst critic. We get mad at ourselves for losing our keys, forgetting to buy milk, or misplacing a bill that needs to be paid. On some days, we may regret how we reacted to a child's misbehavior or a spouse's little quirk. Being critical of ourselves can become a habit. It is stressful and can make us even feel incompetent.

Try switching gears by thinking of things you did right today. It can be as simple as remembering the hug you gave your child after school or how you complimented your spouse for washing the car. Thinking good things about yourself gives you a break and helps you put your mistakes in perspective.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Starting New Traditions

Family traditions are a special part of the holiday season. Families should be creative in using hobbies and talents to develop new traditions. Here are some examples of ways to spend time together as a family and start a tradition.

Keepsake Ornament Box:

Gift wrap the top and bottom of a large box so it can be opened; cut out felt letters and glue on your child's name; then every year add a tree ornament that you make or buy. When your child moves out, the box will contain memorable ornaments for his or her first tree.

Good-Deed Family Project:

Give your time, as a family, to a holiday project that needs volunteers. When agencies ask for donations, they can use people of all ages to process them. Look for organizations' requests or call your Community Services Office.

Be a Helper to a Single Parent:

Volunteer to take a single parent's child shopping to buy Mommy's or Daddy's present. This will give the parent some free time and will provide a surprise gift from the child.

Homemade Family Holiday Cards:

Send unique greetings this holiday season by using your children's talents! Have them draw the family greeting cards, create a card on the computer, or decorate the edges of your holiday cards and letters. This will add a special touch for those who receive the cards.

Megan Mayo and Katey Walker

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