smarter MONEY LIFE

MONEY SKILLS FROM CHILDHOOD TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Teaching kids about money happens in everyday moments. As they grow, their habits are shaped by what they see and experience—so it's critical for parents to reinforce lessons early, connect choices to outcomes, and build confidence in real-world decision-making.

Ages 3–11: Money Basics & Curiosity

The foundation years–where money becomes a real, tangible concept.

- Understand money is exchanged for things (you give it, you get something)
- Learn "wait" and "want" — the basics of patience and delayed gratification
- Talk about needs vs. wants in simple terms (food vs. toys)
- Notice that money can be invisible too — like when a parent taps a phone or card to pay
- Earn money through chores or small tasks
- Set a short-term savings goal (a toy, a book, a game)
- Make small purchasing decisions with their own money
- Understand that online purchases use real money — even if you don't see it leave a wallet
- Always ask a parent before buying anything online or in an app

Ages 12–17: Digital Money & Responsibility

Middle & high schoolers need to understand the digital side of money and personal responsibility.

- Understand debit cards vs. credit cards – what each really does
- Learn how payment apps work (Venmo, Cash App, Apple Pay, Zelle) – the money is real and moves instantly
- Always double-check the recipient before sending money on a payment app
- Never send money to strangers – common scams target teens through gaming and social media
- Use strong passwords and two-factor authentication on every financial app
- Learn online safety – phishing, fake links, and "too good to be true" offers
- Manage a monthly allowance or earnings from babysitting/yard work
- Set short- and medium-term savings goals
- Get a first job and understand your paycheck (gross vs. net pay)
- Build a simple monthly budget with real income and expenses

Ages 18–21: Adulting & Independence

The launch years—where financial decisions start to shape their future.

- Build credit responsibly with a starter credit card (paid in full monthly)
- Understand student loans before signing — interest, repayment, total cost
- Create a real budget for rent, food, transportation, and savings
- Manage digital wallets and payment apps as part of an overall budget
- Protect against fraud — freeze your credit, monitor accounts, and use account alerts
- Start an emergency fund — even $500 makes a difference
- Understand taxes — how to file, what W-2s and 1099s mean
- Avoid lifestyle inflation — just because you earn more doesn't mean you should spend more

THE BIG IDEA: Today's kids are growing up in a cashless, tap-to-pay, app-driven world — which makes early conversations about digital money more important than ever. Financial literacy isn't a one-time talk; it's a series of age-appropriate conversations that build confidence with every swipe, tap, and transfer.

Your Money. Your Way.
We'll help you get there.

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