

Getting to Know You, Your Co-Spender and Money

Families who effectively discuss money matters can avoid many financial problems. Good communication about money begins with understanding each other's values.

This exercise helps you compare values about money. Complete it individually, then compare responses.

For each pair of statements, choose the one you feel is more important. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. a. Paying off the credit card debts at the end of each month.
b. Keeping the minimum monthly payment within a reasonable limit.
2. a. Maintaining individual checking accounts.
b. Having only a joint checking account.
3. a. Having one major wage earner.
b. Having both partners contributing to family income.
4. a. Giving children an allowance because they need to have their own spending money.
b. Giving children an allowance because they have earned it doing their household jobs.
5. a. Purchasing a house as soon as possible.
b. Renting until you can afford to buy.
6. a. Working only at jobs you get paid for.
b. Volunteering as much as you can.
7. a. Making large purchases only when they have been planned.
b. Making a spontaneous purchase if the sale price is good and working out the budget later.
8. a. Having the bills paid on time or before the due date (including rent or mortgage, utilities, credit cards).
b. Paying the bills a little late if no major action will be taken.
9. a. Working at a job I really enjoy even if the pay is low.
b. Working at a job where I can make the most money even though I do not enjoy as much.
10. a. Sacrificing quality for cost.
b. Sacrificing cost for quality.

11. a. Having a savings account and continually tapping into it.
b. Having a savings account that cannot get below a certain level unless it is a real emergency.
12. a. Spending money on both of us.
b. Spending money on my partner.
13. a. Keeping the checkbook balanced to the penny.
b. Knowing about how much money is in the checking account.
14. a. Having some money that can be freely spent and not exactly accounted for.
b. Knowing where every penny has been spent.
15. a. Saving money first.
b. Saving money that is left at the end of the week or month.
16. a. Planning activities and discussions ahead of time such as: something fun, financial discussions, household tasks.
b. Waiting to see what happens.
17. a. Getting a college degree and postponing a career.
b. Getting into the work force as soon as possible.
18. a. Being in control of the budget.
b. Having my partner in control of the budget.
19. a. Keeping the thermostat turned down and wearing a sweater.
b. Keeping the thermostat at a comfortable, warm temperature.
20. a. Experimenting and trying new things that might save money.
b. Keeping your present way of spending since it seems to work.
21. a. Placing your children in day care so each spouse can have a paid job.
b. Keeping your children at home and one parent without a job.
22. a. Borrowing money from your family so you won't have an interest charge.
b. Borrowing money from a bank because you do not want your family to think you are in trouble.
23. a. Discussing any purchases over \$100 before they are made.
b. Assuming you know whether your partner would approve.

24. a. Using the higher wage earner's income for family budget needs, and the lower wage earner keeps the money earned for spending.
b. Combining both incomes for the household budget.

25. a. Putting your money in a high-risk high-return investment.
b. Putting your money in a low-risk moderate-return investment.

Now test your knowledge about your basic expenses.

Write the dollar amounts of:

- Monthly family take-home pay _____
- Rent or mortgage _____
- Monthly food bill _____
- Monthly car payment(s) _____
- Monthly telephone bill _____
- Monthly electric bill _____
- Outstanding credit (cards) _____
- Your last "night on the town" _____
- Last month's away-from-home expenses or cash advances _____

Now Compare

Take time together for a face-to-face discussion about reasons for any disagreements. Remember, answers are neither right nor wrong, just different. The goal is understanding so compromises come easier. Count how many you agreed on and use this guide to help you decide how often to schedule money talks.

Number of times you agreed

- 0-10** A great need for communication to keep the scale balanced. Make it a priority. If compromises can be reached, your value differences can be worked through.

- 11-18** You have some similar values. Discuss all possibilities and listen to each other. Work on compromises you can both live with.

- 19-25** You have very similar values and will not often find yourself in conflict. Discuss any problems that arise.

If your knowledge of spending amounts varies, it may be time to keep written records of your expenses for a while. It is best if both people know where it is going and plan together to reach mutual goals.