GETTING STARTED

Spending *tracker*

Before deciding on changes to your spending, it's a good idea to understand how you use your money now.

Keeping track of what you earn and everything you spend money on for a month, rather than just a week or two, lets you see all of your income and expenses in one place. Many people who track their spending for a month discover that they're spending money in small ways that add up and sometimes don't match their priorities. Once they track their spending, many people can find money to save for emergencies, unexpected expenses, and goals. Others are able to balance their budgets.

What to do

Track Every Dollar. Track every dollar you spend. Save your receipts in an envelope or folder. If you don't get a receipt, write down what you bought and how much you spent. You can also use a phone app, take pictures of receipts, or use a simple worksheet to record your expenses. Choose the method that works best for you!

Analyze your spending. Go through your receipts and enter the total you spent in each category for each week. Add the weekly amounts per category. Write these down in the "Category totals" column. Once you have these totals, add them together to get your total spending for the month. If tracking your spending for a whole month seems too difficult, try it for just one or two weeks.

Notice trends. Circle items that are the same every month (like rent, car, or cell phone payments). These are often your needs and obligations. This will make creating your budget easier. Identify any areas you can eliminate or cut back on—these will generally be wants.

A *spending tracker* can help you analyze and change your spending habits.

1. Get an envelope to collect your receipts.
2. Use the table to track your spending in the categories below. Don't forget about bills you share with others.
3. At the end of the month, add up each category.

SPENDING FOR THE MONTH OF _____

CATEGORY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	CATEGORY TOTALS
Cell phone						$
Debt payment						$
Eating out						$
Education + childcare						$
Entertainment + personal care						$
Groceries + other supplies						$
Health expenses						$
Helping others						$
Housing + utilities						$
Pets						$
Transport						$
Other						$

Totals add up automatically when filled in on a device.

Total spending this month $

CATEGORIES USED IN THE SPENDING TRACKER

Cell phone	Any costs related to having and using your cell phone
Debt payment	Credit card payments, payday loan payments, pawn loan payments, auto title loan payments, other loan payments
Eating out	Any meals or beverages purchased outside of the home
Education + childcare	Childcare costs, school supplies, school materials fees, field trips, other activity fees
Entertainment + personal care	Movies or concerts, sports equipment/fees, sporting events, lottery tickets, alcohol, books/CDs, subscriptions, streaming services, haircuts, hygiene items, dry cleaning
Groceries + other supplies	Food and beverages brought into the home, household supplies (diapers, paper towels, etc.)
Health expenses	Co-payments, medication, eye care, dental care, health insurance premiums
Helping others	Donations to religious organizations or other charities, gifts
Housing + utilities	Rent, mortgage, insurance, property taxes, electricity, gas, water and sewage, landline, television, Internet service
Pets	Food, vet bills, and other costs associated with caring for your pets
Transport	Gas, car payment, insurance, repairs, transit fares, ride services, cabs
Other	• Court-ordered expenses (child support, restitution) • Household items (things for your home like cleaning supplies, kitchen appliances, furniture, other equipment) • Savings (saving for emergencies, goals, back-to-school expenses, holiday purchases, children's education, retirement) • Tools or other job-related expenses (equipment, special clothing, job-related books, machinery, working animals or livestock, union dues)

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