Navigating Finances as a Couple Takes Savvy

All of us have attitudes about money. Most of us have acquired our views of money from our parents. But our culture, the media and our close friends and family members can also influence us as to how we handle finances. A death or divorce can also cause fear, debt, mistrust, uncertainty or other financial challenges that may affect marriage—if you don't deal with those issues up front.

If one of you is a person who spends a lot and needs the latest brand-name fashions, wants to eat out a lot or loves to shop while the other wants to save every penny, there is bound to be conflict. To avoid this, couples should make it a point to discuss their financial purchases regularly and deal with them wisely.

Financial Priorities

Understanding each other's money priorities and views can defuse many disagreements. But that's only half the battle. Self-discipline and restraint are also critical components.

Together you need to come to a mutual agreement on how much you will spend and save, what sacrifices you will make and what priorities you will establish. And when kids—and all their financial obligations—are involved, it can get pretty complicated!

God ordained that we should be good stewards and manage our resources well. He wants us to acquire money honestly (Prov. 13:11), invest it carefully (Matt. 25:16, Luke 14:28), spend it wisely (John 12) and share it joyfully (Ps. 15:5, Acts 5). Couples that will find ways to do this wisely will thrive in this area.

Ghostly Money Matters

For many second-marriage couples, the exes can often be a minefield and the cause of financial difficulties, such as alimony and child support payments. Many couples we've counseled have come into their second marriage with debt from the prior marriage(s), or with huge financial obligations from them. They may also have ongoing financial frustrations with their ex, especially those who repeatedly took them to court to get more alimony or child support. Whatever the case may be, challenges such as these can cause stress, so you must figure out how to manage them together.

Others may find that their mate has poor money management skills or unhealthy money attitudes that need to be addressed. If one of you has insufficient income to pay the bills, refuses to balance the checkbook regularly, has a get-rich-quick attitude or is unwilling to work hard to make ends meet—these are signs of unhealthy financial thinking.

Other poor financial habits are borrowing beyond your means or making purchases on credit while paying only the minimum payment on a revolving credit account. These are warning signs of poor stewardship, and it's best to work through these problems early. An irresponsible financial attitude will certainly haunt you and hurt your relationship.

Money Talk

Though finances are not always easy to discuss, start early and be open and honest as you make your financial life a successful one. And remember that your attitude about money is what's important, not the amount you have. And most importantly, if you need help dealing with financial issues, get it.

Talk through money issues and strategically work together to find wise solutions to the challenges you may encounter. Philippians 4:6-7 will help you along the way: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God."

Adapted from *The ReMarriage Adventure: Preparing for a Lifetime of Love & Happiness*, by Susan and Dale Mathis. Visit for more on the adventure of remarriage.

Susan G. Mathis *is the former editorial director at Focus on the Family and founding editor of the company's* Thriving Family *magazine. She has experience in consulting, mentoring and speaking, and is a best-selling author.*