



July & August 2006

Establishing a spending plan is essential to financial management

For many Oklahomans it seems there is “too much month left at the end of the paycheck.” While this can be said in jest, not having enough money to meet basic financial needs is no laughing matter.

It is essential to establish spending and savings plans in order to gain control of your finances, said Sissy Osteen, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service resource management specialist.

“Planning for spending is a financial practice that many consumers fail to do and this can lead to frustration with money matters and overuse of credit,” Osteen said. “Putting together a spending plan is like putting together a ‘financial puzzle.’ The important pieces of the puzzle are income, expenses, reserve accounts and credit use.”

The first step in establishing a financial plan is to determine exactly how much money is available. Sources of income include any combination of take home pay, tips, Social Security, retirement, public assistance, alimony, child support, veterans’ benefits, unemployment, interest and dividends, student loans, income tax refunds or other sources of income that are regular. Do not include overtime pay and other sources of income that are not regular or reliable.

When determining how much income is available, figure the net amount, not the gross amount. The net amount reflects actual available cash after deductions have been made.

“To plan for spending, consumers need to know where the money is going,” she said.

When determining monthly expenses it is essential to be realistic. Expenses include rent or house payment, home repairs and maintenance, utilities, groceries, meals away from home,

toiletries, baby supplies such as diapers and formula, allowances for children, school expenses, barber and beauty appointments, gasoline, car maintenance, insurance, medical, clothing, dry cleaning, gifts, newspaper and magazine subscriptions, vacations, pets, contributions, entertainment, child care or child support and miscellaneous.

After expenses are determined, determine how much money is needed in a reserve account. This account is made up of all expenses that are paid out irregularly like auto insurance, gifts, vacations, home maintenance, etc. It is one of the most important elements in making a spending plan work and is the part that most consumers overlook. The reserve account is used for paying quarterly, semiannual or annual bills such as insurance and taxes. Without it, individuals tend to use credit to cover these expenses.

“Savings is the most important part of expenses and should be figured first,” she said. “Oftentimes when finances are tight, consumers find it hard to save any cash for future spending or to put into a reserve or emergency fund.” Families need three to six months of their living expenses set aside in an emergency account to bridge the gap in cases of unforeseen crises.

When making a written financial plan, be sure to include credit use. Misuse of credit can be costly. Consumers should not spend more than 15 percent of their monthly income on credit payments.

“All financial plans will need some adjustments. These adjustments will make those ‘puzzle pieces’ fit together more easily,” Osteen said.

Daily Racing Against the Clock: Families Who Do Too Much

With the days summers at our backs we are faced with a new school year and we find ourselves already overwhelmed. You've got lunches to make, kids to drop off, kids to pick up, practices to go to and baths to takes.



Most likely each person in your family feels the stress of beginning in a new routine. Because of many changes and being so busy, there is little time to check in with family members to see how they are doing. Think about each person in your family – do some deal with change different than others? Who is the most flexible and seems ok with changes? Who is the most rigid or structured and really needs change to happen slowly? It is likely each person copes differently.

Chaos is the name of the game and you and your family members are the players trying to catch a win. Will you each participate in your own separate games or will you unite as a team to assure the defeat? As a team you will need some skills that each member must work hard to supply.

Family Skills to Combat Chaos

☺ **Talk about changes before they happen.** Family members will all benefit from being able to expect change. Talking beforehand allows members to possibly make a plan to prevent over-involvement and separateness in the family. It also allows people to discuss their feelings about upcoming changes.



☺ **Plan some quality time at the beginning of each week.** Any time with your child or with the whole family can be made into quality time; but time set aside and uninterrupted is without a doubt QUALITY. Kids will be less harmed by an over involved lifestyle if they have structured times each

week with their family or parents where they are reminded they are loved, protected and special.

☺ **Family Business Meetings.** Have a short time each week where all are informed of the week's activities. Again, this allows everyone to know what is happening when, so that change is not so sudden. This is also a good time for members to discuss how they are doing – are they feeling worn out? Burdened? Over-worked? Let each person's feelings be heard by all members. If something needs to be done to help the tired feelings, then all members are present to work together. Does someone need more quality time? Should an activity be cut down or out? Does some feel left out of all that is going on throughout the week?



Step off the Gas

Here are some sure-fire reminders for getting the most out of your tank of gas:

1. Slow down. The average car used 17% less gas at 55 mph than at 65 mph.
2. Driving in low gear when a higher gear is available will use up to twice as much gas.
3. Idling can run up a \$90 gas bill each year for some cars. Turning off the car and restarting it is less costly than continuing to idle.
4. Choose your route carefully. Pot holes filled roads required 15% more gas than smooth-paved roads; and loose-gravel roads required 35% more gas than paved roads.
5. Don't spend the extra money on premium, high octane gas unless your car knocks or pings.

Source: *Frugal Families 2005*

TV Programs Taking Over Child's Play Time



Many parents are challenged with controlling exactly what and how much children are watching on the television, and some may be challenged with getting children to find other activities to focus on.

The average American child will spend 28 hours per week watching television, 30 hours per week in a classroom and 39 minutes per week talking one-on-one with a parent, said Debbie Richardson, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension parenting specialist.

“Kids watching four or more hours of television per day put less effort toward school work, have poorer reading skills and don’t play as well with friends,” Richardson said. “They also have fewer hobbies and activities, and they are more likely to be overweight.”

Increased time watching television was associated with decreased time interacting with parents and siblings and playing creatively, according to a study conducted at The University of Texas at Austin.

“The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of two should not watch television and children older than two should watch no more than two hours of television per day,” said Tommie M. James, Choctaw County Family & Consumer Science Extension Educator. “However, children who regularly watch curriculum-education based programs have better problem-solving skills, language abilities and social skills.”

Walking, talking and thinking are learned through real interactions with people, Richardson said. Sensory, emotional, and physical deprivation or excessive stimulation can occur with television.

Tips for taming the tube:

- Avoid using the television as a babysitter.
- Know what your kids are watching.

- Set guidelines for what your children can watch.
- Decide, in advance, what is “good TV.”
- No television during meals.
- Encourage alternative activities.
- Create a television coupon system.
- Have control of your own television viewing – be a good role model.

Some ways to help monitor what children are watching is by ratings and V-chips.

“Ratings and V-chips are advances in improving the child’s exposure to negative TV,” Richardson said. “They are standard devices and similar V-chips are available for DVD or VHS movies to help control the language.”

NEW

Parenting Education Programs Available

1 2 3 4 Parents!

A program geared for parents of toddlers, the basic developmental stages from ages one to four.

Active Parenting Now

A program geared for parents of children ages 5 to 12, to help parents raise responsible and cooperative children who are prepared to meet the challenges of the teen years.

For additional information, contact
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OHCE Members Recognized

Choctaw County OHCE was well represented at the State OHCE Meeting held in Oklahoma City. There were thirteen OHCE members who attended the state conference: Anne Page, Elizabeth McKee, Katie and Sammie Wolfenbarger, Stacy and Linda Knight, Christie Hood, Maria Langford, Sherrie Vansickle, Jean Brinkley, Mary Duke, Sherri Cheek and Sabrina West.

The following OHCE members and clubs were recognized:

1st Photography: Sherri Cheek

2nd Healthy Living Local Group:
Sherri Cheek, LOV-n-OHCE

2nd Resource Management Local Group:
Sabrina West, LOV-n-OHCE

Most Outstanding Projects:
Sherri Cheek, LOV-n-OHCE

50 Year Members:
Elizabeth McKee, Buckhorn
Jean Brinkley, Boswell



Sabrina West receives state OHCE award presented by Debra Stevenson, State OHCE President

2006 Choctaw Co. Fair September 13 – 16



It's time to start putting some thought into what items you might enter in the Choctaw County Fair. All entries must have been made after October 1 of 2005.

Make sure you check-out the 2006 fair book, because a few changes have been made to the Open Division. Examples of new exhibits added are cobblers, scrapbook page, purse and tote bag.

The 2006 fair book will be available soon for viewing on the Choctaw Co. OSU Extension web page: www.county.okstate.edu/choctaw/

OHCE Upcoming Events

“Made In Oklahoma”

Lunch-n-Learn
Thursday, July 20
12:00 noon
OSU Extension Office, Hugo

*Presenter: Tommie M. James, FCS & 4-H
Extension Educator, Choctaw County*



OHCE Fall Council Meeting

Thursday, August 17
10:00 am

“Computer Quick Tips”

Thursday, August 17
12:00 noon
OSU Extension Office, Hugo

*Presenter: Starr Edwards, FCS & 4-H
Extension Educator, Atoka County*



Family & Consumer Science Newline is published as one way of communicating educational information to the citizens of Choctaw County:

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