



Let's Talk About Money: Managing Your Financial Reality Handout

Many caregivers have given up jobs to care for their Veteran loved one. Many caregivers live on a fixed income. Managing your finances on a fixed income can be a challenge. Some caregivers must depend on the Veterans income to meet their needs. Do you depend on the Veterans income to support you? Does this lead you to feel you don't have equal say in the decisions you make together? Take charge of your financial situation, whatever it may be. Here are some strategies to empower you to take charge of your financial life.

How did your childhood history mold your beliefs about money?

- What was your experience? Was money tight or did you grow up with wealth?
- Who influenced how you think about or manage money?
- What messages did you learn about money, your access to it, or the power it has?

How do you use money? What are your practices?

- How you spend, save, and manage the money that you do have? How much control or say do you have in your financial circumstance?
- What is your current financial situation, and do you see yourself as; in control of it, happy with it, avoiding or denying it, accepting of it or wanting to change it?

Get your head out of the sand.

- Look at your financial status head on. Be honest with yourself and don't avoid the truth. Talk with your partner about your finances. Don't keep financial secrets and don't remain in the dark about finances. Stay informed.

Create a written budget sheet. (For the VA Caregiver Program Web Site Budget Sheet click here, https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/Caring_for_your_Finances.asp)

- Identify all sources of income. (employment, social security, disability, pensions etc.)
- Review 3 months of your bank statements. Capture all your fixed expenses going out each month. (rent mortgage, food, utilities, car payments credit card, loans etc.)
- Capture the money spent on items that are not regular or planned expenses. (personal care items, gifts, clothing entertainment)
- Make sure to capture all withdrawals from ATM's and how that money was spent.

Review budget balance sheet. Do you have a cash surplus or deficit? Develop a plan to manage the savings or deficits.



Cut costs where you can. Consider these options:

- **Mortgage/Rent**-Find a lender with a lower interest rate. Move to a different neighborhood. Move to a smaller home. Take in a boarder or share housing. Ask the landlord to cost cut on rent for supplying maintenance or upkeep.
- **Food**-Plan meals. Make a grocery list to avoid impulse spending. Use public markets. Negotiate lower prices with sellers. Buy and cook in bulk. Make use of leftovers. Have pot lucks. Grow a garden or join a community garden.
- **Utilities**-Ask the company to put you on a budget. Turn down heat or air conditioning. Turn the lights out when not in the room.
- **Cable and cell services**-Cut the cable. Find a cheaper service that can stream entertainment. Explore cheaper cell service or share plans with family.
- **Identify wants vs. needs**-Is the item a need or can it wait? Be patient.

Set up your checking account for automatic bill pay. Set up automatic savings to avoid money in hand.

Change shopping patterns-Do not visit shopping malls. Go to the mall only if you have a specific item to buy. Buy used items such as; cars, clothing, furniture. Shop estate and garage sales for bargains.

Reach out for help and negotiate payments-Don't ignore late credit card bills. Negotiate with creditors for a lower rate or payment plan. If not successful with the first responder, ask to speak with a manager. Be polite and calm. Give them a low-ball estimate of what you can pay each month to get caught up.

Take on extra work-Consider taking a second job. Take on odd jobs such as; babysitting, dog walking, gardening, housecleaning or cooking. Tutor or train someone if you have a special skill.

Talk with your partner-Find a non-stress time to talk about money. Discuss your history with money growing up. Talk about how you handle money. Explore each other's individual wants needs and goals. Listen to each other with the goal to understand. Respect their point of view.

Plan for emergencies and future goals. Plan for when you retire-It takes restraint to set aside money when it is tight. It is important to plan for the unexpected when money is tight because one cost can set you back. Save and plan for your future retirement.

Find free fun. Connect with others-Look for the fun and happiness that is free. Plan pot lucks at your home where friends and family can contribute. Head outside to a park, beach, or playground. Get some exercise. Check the library or local newspapers for free events. Engage in self-care. Call a friend or make a new friend. Enjoy the small moments of fun and pleasure!