

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Money: Yours, Mine, and Ours?

The question of how to handle money issues is a major concern for most remarried couples. Trust and commitment issues from previous marriage experiences can influence how couples decide to handle their money. Frequently, couples are hesitant to relinquish control of their personal money and are also uncomfortable talking about money matters with their new spouse.

Because it is often difficult to pool financial resources in the beginning of a remarriage, stepfamilies frequently use the “yours, mine, and ours” plan of managing their finances. Couples who favor pooling their money into an “ours” pot are no more or less satisfied with their money management than those who keep their money separate. In fact, it doesn’t matter which plan is chosen as long as it meets the needs of the stepfamily.

Maintaining separate accounts often does not reflect a lack of love or commitment. Instead, the decision to keep money separate may be an effort to avoid potential hassles and preserve individual autonomy. This decision also acknowledges each partner’s separate or different interests and needs. While separate accounts provide flexibility, most remarried couples eventually drift into at least some pooling of funds out of convenience. Joint accounts that seem to work for these couples are usually funded in proportion to each spouse’s income.

Overall, most remarried couples adopt one of two variations of the “yours, mine, and ours” plan: (1) small separate accounts and a large joint account, or (2) large separate accounts and small joint account. Usually the joint account pays for the mortgage, groceries, utilities, and entertainment. Their Individual accounts pay for expenses related to their biological children and any individually owned property.

Budgeting household dollars, tracking daily spending and sharing decision-making is key to the success of joint accounts. Couples need to regularly talk about, compromise and renegotiate what is best and fair. For example, the belief that each partner must contribute an equal share toward the stepfamily household expenses is seldom fair. Research shows that most wives, on average, earn less than their husbands and incoming child-support payments do not often make up the difference. When this happens wives feel dependent and the husband feels he is paying too much.

Here are a few important questions to consider when deciding how to manage stepfamily finances:

- What money is to be separate? Shared?
- If separated, how much will each partner contribute to running the household?
- If pooled jointly, what will the money be used for?
- Who will be responsible for managing the books (and how)?
- Will monthly or yearly expense plans be created?
- How will financial emergencies be handled?
- What is the limit for spending without consulting the other?
- How much discussion is appropriate when purchases are made?

Remarried couples should consider having a financial system that provides money for each spouse’s personal needs and the family’s joint needs. Also, any money management plan needs to be flexible to adapt to changes, emergencies, and evolving needs. What’s right is what you negotiate to be right for your family. For more helpful advice and tools to strengthen your stepfamily, visit the National Stepfamily Resource Center at www.stepfamilies.info.

Activity

Sit down with your partner and discuss the above questions. Consider researching and talking to friends who have been in a similar situation to see how other remarried couples handle money. It may help to use a budget spreadsheet to see how much you each bring to the relationship (income) and what your personal and shared expenses include. Consider consulting with a financial planner if you need help. Remember, there is no right way to handle money in a remarriage. Open, healthy communication is key to working out money matters and keeping your relationship happy and satisfactory.

For more resources, visit healthyrelationships.uga.edu and ElevateCouplesGeorgia.com.

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