5 secrets to bill paying with a spouse

Paying your bills on time is the toilet cleaning of managing your household finances. It's not much fun, and if it's not done correctly or on time, the crap really piles up.

Not paying your bills on time will result in a lower credit score, consequences from whoever was owed the money, and likely a squabble with your partner.

Here are five secrets for you and your partner to pay your bills on time.

Secret #1: Decide how you will share your financial resources.

"No one approach is necessarily right or wrong. What's important is for couples to make a conscious choice about what's best for them." (1)

There are three primary approaches. Keeping your finances separated; Pulling all of your finances together; Having a hybrid model – having a joint account for shared expenses and separate accounts for discretionary spending.

Unless you keep all of your finances separate, consider establishing spending limits between you and your partner, which is an agreement not to spend more than the spending limit without consulting each other. Each partner gives the other veto power over purchases that exceed the limit.

Equal power is essential if one partner is the clear breadwinner to avoid that person having the power to make all decisions. (1)

Sometimes one of the partners struggles to spend any money at all, and an appropriate approach is for the other partner to encourage budgeted spending.

When using the hybrid model called Yours, Mine, and Ours, it may be necessary to use equal percentages of income rather than dollar amounts when contributing to the joint account if there is a vast difference in pay between the partners.

Pooling couples have the lowest probability of disagreements. Even younger dual-earner couples in Germany who adopted partial pooling more frequently had financial disagreements than dual-earner partners who pooled all money.

Even couples living paycheck to paycheck are most likely to arise among couples who partially pool their money and keep their money separate. Low-income couples with small children in the US have a better relationship quality when they pool money. (2)

Secret #2: Managing money can be a one-person job if that's what you and your partner believe is best while controlling money is a different story altogether.

Controlling money is the financial goal of setting and constructing a savings and spending plan. Both partners should have an equal voice in this process.

Managing money is executing the spending and saving plan to reach your shared goals. Dividing these responsibilities is up to each couple. Deciding who should do what can depend on what you each enjoy, your skill sets, your career and family obligations, and considerations for other tasks at home that soak up your time.

In other words, decide together how you want money saved and spent and then figure out who will be responsible for the task of paying bills.

Secret #3: Schedule regular Money Dates to establish a spending and savings plan based on your goals and values, and then set a bill-paying system to execute.

Prioritize being empathetic and a good listener. Talking about money can be tricky, particularly for those who have experienced financial trauma. Money is the most significant cause of stress and strongly predicts mental disorders, general psychological distress, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Modern Husband Advisory Board Member Ed Coambs shared the common pain points he sees in his work as a financial therapist.

Make sure the image is linked to this:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzViLwvSfsc

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Consider each other's skill sets, time, and interests when determining who is responsible for paying what bills and ensure the roles and responsibilities are clear.

Spend a little time to save a lot of money by enrolling in the self-paced online course Money Marriage U Save, which includes Money Date cards to help guide your conversation.

Secret #4. Be transparent about the bills.

Financial infidelity is when couples who have combined their finances deceive each other about money. Surveys repeatedly find that this is the case for 2 in 5 couples. There are several painful outcomes to this, including that it led to divorce for 16% of folks.

Listen to NEFE President and CEO Dr. Billy Hensley share more about their financial infidelity research.

Make sure the image is linked to this: https://www.buzzsprout.com/2000968/11033342-opening-up-about-financial-infidelity-dr-billy-hensley

Secret #5: Use the right resources and reminder tools.

We created this free budgeting template for couples, including linked short videos to provide guidance and discussion prompts.

Setting reminders on your phone or computer for each bill can help. And there are several free resources you can draw from. Check out our Bill Paying Free Resources. Some of my favorites are the CFPB Bill Calendar and Debt Consolidation Calculator.

(1) Klontz, Brad. Facilitating Financial Health Tools for Financial Planners, Coaches, and Therapists. The National Underwriter Company, 2016.

(2) Kridahl, L., Duvander, AZ. Financial Disagreements and Money Management Among Older Married and Cohabiting Couples in Sweden. J Fam Econ Iss (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-022-09846-z