



HOW TO KEEP YOUR HOME & BUY ON TOO

SAVING, BUYING, AND THRIVING

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RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY

A person's relationship to money refers to their emotional connections, attitude, and behaviors they have with money. I grew up in the heart of a public housing project where money was often short, but dreams were big. My earliest lessons about money weren't from books or classrooms. These lessons were a result of watching my family stretch every dollar to ensure that rent was paid to avoid eviction. Back then, I didn't understand credit, savings, or the idea of building wealth – but neither did mother who raised seven children in a low-income housing project.

When I became the first in my family to go to college, I carried those same money habits with me. Like many students from underserved communities, I stumbled with credit cards, budgeting felt impossible, and saving was never an option. The truth is, I had to unlearn some habits and build new ones from scratch. That journey wasn't easy, but it was necessary.

Slowly, I began to see that money is more than numbers on a paycheck. I learned how credit could either open doors or close them. I discovered that saving even small amounts consistently created options I never thought possible. I realized that a budget wasn't about restriction, but about freedom: the freedom to plan, to choose, and to dream.

The biggest turning point came when I decided to buy my first home. That process forced me to apply every lesson learned along my journey to financial independence. These lessons included how to keep my credit healthy, how to save for a down payment, and how to manage my finances so I could not only buy a house but keep it. Owning a home became more than just having a set of keys; it was a symbol of stability and possibility, a foundation to build a future.

This e-book was created to help housing counselors take those lessons and translate them into practical, innovative tools for the residents they serve. Counselors have the power to bridge the gap between survival and stability, between renting and owning, between feeling powerless and becoming financially confident.

In the chapters ahead, you'll find strategies for teaching savings in ways that feel doable, breaking down credit so it's no longer intimidating, making budgets feel empowering, and guiding residents through the path of homeownership. But more than strategies, this book offers perspective: the understanding that financial education has to be real, relatable, and rooted in the lives of the people we're trying to help.

Because when residents see that someone like them who grew up in the same neighborhoods, faced the same challenges, and made the same mistakes discovered the path to homeownership, it makes the dream of financial freedom feel possible.

SECTION ONE



HOW CLIENTS THINK ABOUT MONEY

For many people in underserved communities, money is not just a tool for exchange but often a source of stress, confusion, and survival. Without regular opportunities to practice budgeting, saving, or using financial services, money becomes something to react to rather than manage with intention. People may think of money in terms of immediate needs such as paying bills, buying food, or covering emergencies. But, housing counselors have to work with clients to help them think about the role of money in long-term planning. During our focus groups, several of the participants shared how their relationship with money was based on what they observed in their homes. “When we had money to buy clothes, jewelry, and cars, life was good. But, when my Mom loss her job, she had no savings and we were evicted from our home, said one participant.”

Lesson Plan One

RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY

Icebreaker & Introduction (5 minutes)

- Activity: Ask participants: “If you had \$100 today, what’s the first thing you’d spend it on?”
- Write responses on a board or flip chart.
- Transition by explaining: “Some of those answers are needs, some are wants, and sometimes it’s not so easy to tell the difference.”

Defining Needs vs. Wants (5 minutes)

Facilitator Input:

Needs: Basic essentials for survival and stability (food, housing, utilities, health, education).

Wants: Things that improve quality of life, provide comfort, or entertainment, but are not essential.

Ask participants to give one example of a need and one of a want from their own lives.

Sorting Game (10 minutes)

Materials: Pre-made cards or slips of paper with items written on them (e.g., “rent,” “Netflix subscription,” “school supplies,” “new shoes,” “medicine,” “vacation,” “fast food,” “bus fare,” etc.).

Activity:

Split participants into small groups.

Each group sorts the cards into two piles: Needs and Wants.

Twist: Some items can be debated (e.g., “new shoes” might be a need if the old ones are worn out).

Discussion: Groups share what items were hardest to categorize and why.

Reflection Exercise: Personal Spending (10 minutes)

Worksheet or Prompt: Ask participants to think about their last week of spending. Write down 3 things they bought.

Circle the ones that were needs.

Square the ones that were wants.

Small Group Share: Have volunteers share an example of a “want” they chose and why.

Facilitator Note: Emphasize there is nothing “wrong” with wants—balance is the key.

Budget Challenge (7 minutes)

Scenario: Give each group a pretend budget of \$200 and a list of expenses (rent \$100, groceries \$50, phone bill \$30, movie tickets \$20, new jacket \$40, etc.).

Activity: Groups must decide together how to spend the \$200.

Discussion: Ask: “What did you prioritize first? What did you leave out? How did it feel to make those choices?”

Wrap-Up & Key Takeaways (3 minutes)

Summarize:

Needs keep us safe and stable.

Wants make life enjoyable.

Money choices are about balancing the two.

Closing prompt: “Next time you spend money, ask yourself: Is this a need, a want, or a mix of both?”

Lesson Plan Two

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN & HAPPINESS

Introduction (15 minutes)

Welcome and purpose:

Acknowledge the challenges of poverty without judgment.

Emphasize that happiness is not only about money, but money does affect stress, opportunities, and dignity.

State the workshop's goal: to explore the connection between money and happiness and to share practical ways to use money as a tool for well-being.

Icebreaker:

Ask participants: "What makes you happy that doesn't cost money?"

(Examples: time with family, music, faith, community).

Understanding Happiness (20 minutes)

Discussion: What is happiness?

Break participants into small groups to list things that make them happy. Share back with the room.

Key takeaway: Research shows happiness comes from relationships, purpose, health, and security—not just wealth.

Visual activity: Draw two circles:

Circle A: Things money can buy (food, rent, medicine).

Circle B: Things money can't buy (love, peace, kindness).

Discuss where the circles overlap.

Money as a Tool (30 minutes)

Mini-lecture:

Money doesn't guarantee happiness, but financial stress can take away happiness.

Using money wisely can create more peace of mind.

Interactive activity: "Needs vs. Wants"

Provide cards with items (rent, groceries, internet, birthday party, soda, school fees, lottery tickets, etc.).

Ask participants to sort them into needs and wants.

Reflection: "If I had a little extra money, what small choice could I make that would bring me more happiness?"

Closing and Commitments (15 minutes)

Discussion:

"What one thing can I do this week with my money to support my happiness?"

Closing message:

Money is limited, but happiness can grow through choices, perspective, and community.

Encourage ongoing support between participants.