RelationTips

Talking about money: having healthier conversations about finances

Relationships Australia WA is the state's leading support for relationship wellbeing. Our tip sheets provide information to help people navigate life's challenges and build happier, healthier lives.

Money is part of everyday life, but talking about it isn't always easy. Conversations about spending, saving, debt, bills or future plans can quickly become emotional, particularly when finances are already under pressure. We can find ourselves avoiding the subject altogether or having the same disagreement without feeling like we're getting anywhere.

Often, the tension isn't simply about the dollars. Our experiences with money can be shaped by how we grew up, our sense of security, our values and what we believe money should be used for. One person may feel safer saving for the future, while another places greater value on enjoying life today. Neither perspective is necessarily wrong, but understanding where each person is coming from can make it easier to find a way forward together.

Here are some ways to have healthier conversations about money.

1. Understand what money means to you

Before talking about finances with someone else, consider your own relationship with money.

Did your family talk openly about finances when you were growing up? Does having savings make you feel secure? Does spending money on experiences feel important to you?

Understanding your own attitudes can help you explain what matters to you without assuming the other person sees things the same way.

2. Choose your moment

Try not to wait until you're frustrated, worried or facing an unexpected bill to talk about money. Choose a time when you can both give the conversation your attention. Regular, smaller conversations can also make money feel like an ordinary part of your relationship, rather than something that only gets discussed when there's a problem.

3. Start with curiosity, not blame

Language matters. Comments such as “You always spend too much” can quickly make someone feel criticised or defensive.

Instead, try asking questions. What is worrying each of you? What feels most important right now? What would help you both feel more secure?

Listening to understand, rather than preparing your response, can change the direction of a difficult conversation.

4. Be honest about how you’re feeling

Money concerns can bring up fear, embarrassment, frustration, guilt or shame. Sometimes these emotions come out as anger or withdrawal instead.

Being able to say, “I’m worried about how we’re going to manage this” can open a very different conversation from arguing over individual purchases.

You don’t need to have an immediate solution. Sometimes being heard and understood is an important first step.

5. Focus on what matters to you both

Money disagreements can sometimes become focused on individual purchases or decisions, while the bigger picture gets lost.

Consider what matters to you both. It might be feeling more secure, supporting your family, reducing financial pressure, or still making room to enjoy life together. Identifying shared priorities can help move the conversation away from who is right or wrong and towards what you’re working towards together.

6. Talk about the financial load

Managing money involves more than paying bills. There can also be planning, keeping track of expenses, remembering due dates, researching options, and making decisions – and that responsibility can sometimes fall more heavily on one person.

Talk openly about who is carrying these responsibilities and whether the arrangement still feels fair. Sharing the load doesn't necessarily mean dividing everything equally, but both people should feel informed, involved, and able to have a say in decisions that affect them.

As circumstances change, check in with each other and be willing to adjust what works.

7. Know when to ask for support

Money can be difficult to talk about, particularly when financial pressure has been building over time. If conversations are becoming a source of conflict, worry, or distance in your relationship, reaching out for support early can help.

You don't have to navigate financial stress alone. A counsellor can provide a supportive space to work through communication, conflict, and the emotions surrounding money. If you need practical financial guidance, a financial counsellor can also help you understand your options and find a way forward.

Healthy relationships aren't built on agreeing about everything. They're strengthened when we can talk about difficult things with honesty, respect, and care.

Money may always bring different priorities and perspectives, but understanding each other can make financial challenges feel less isolating and help you make decisions as a team.

If financial stress is affecting your wellbeing or relationships, confidential support is available through your Employee Assistance Program.

No matter where you are in your journey, we can connect you with the right service and right support at the right time.

Together, we'll find a way.