GET YOUR FINANCES BACK ON TRACK

MIDYEAR CHECKLIST

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ADOBE STOCK

With everyday essentials like gas and food getting more expensive, budgeting in 2026 can feel like running on a treadmill that keeps speeding up.

"Inflation is hitting rather hard," says Jason Fannon, a certified financial planner (CFP) and senior partner at Cornerstone Financial Services in Southfield, Michigan.

More of your dollars are likely going toward necessities, so you need to plan for some cuts in other areas. "You have to adjust for the back half of the year," he says.

That task starts with combing through previous spending to spot where costs have been rising, Fannon says. Consider areas — like vacations and ordering takeout — where you could potentially cut back.

Tracking recent spending and adapting to higher prices are the first two steps of a midyear financial checklist. Here are a few other ways to get financially ready for the last six months of the year.

LOOK FOR LIFE CHANGES

It's not just inflation that's altering budgeting plans.

"I want people to think of midyear as a moment to reconnect money with real life," says Ohan Kayikchyan, CFP and founder of Alohana Financial in Durham, North Carolina.

Consider what changes have happened in your life that impact your finances, such as a move, new job or a big purchase. How have your values and priorities shifted as a result?

"Does your financial plan still reflect the life you actually want today?" Kayikchyan asks.

Reviewing your recent spending — using credit card and banking apps — will help you see where you stand.

"It's about awareness, not perfection," he says. "Savings accounts and credit cards are like mirrors reflecting where our life is going." If you're seeing something you don't want, then midyear is the time to make shifts.

That might lead to ending subscriptions you no longer value or letting go of a service you signed up for months ago. It could mean cooking more at home instead of ordering takeout, or taking public transportation to work instead of driving, Kayikchyan adds.

CHECK ON YOUR GOAL PROGRESS

Fannon encourages clients to set three goals at the beginning of the year and then check on their progress at the year's midpoint.

If you haven't done it yet, it's not too late.

Those goals could be tasks like setting up an estate plan or saving up for something big, like a new car. Use the midpoint to check in, or set up an automatic savings transfer.

If someone is behind on their goal — such as having saved only $100 a month for retirement instead of $500 — Fannon urges them to stay positive and look for solutions.

"Let's talk about your income and expenses. Are there opportunities to earn more? When's the last time you called your cable or auto insurance company to ask them about better rates?"

If you happen to be on track or are even exceeding your goals, it might be time to set bigger ones, he adds. "We don't want to become complacent."

PREPARE FOR TAX SEASON

Fannon says it's a good idea to get ready for the next tax season now. You can organize paperwork and check on any needed quarterly estimated tax payments.

Property tax payments may also be due midyear.

If you received a sizable tax refund for the previous tax year, you may want to adjust your withholding now to receive more in each paycheck, for example.

"People like refunds, but a refund is money you lend to the IRS," Kayikchyan says.

STRENGTHEN RETIREMENT SAVINGS

While traditional 401(k) contributions generally carry a December 31 deadline, midyear is a good time to make sure you're going to meet retirement savings goals, and make any adjustments, if not.

It's easier to bump up your contributions now than deposit a large lump sum at the end of the year, Kayikchyan says.

Of course, you'll want to balance retirement savings with your other goals and demands, says John Gillet, CEO and founder of the Gillet Agency, a financial planning firm in Hollywood, Florida.

If you can't max out, make sure you're at least getting the company match, Gillet says. "Or else you are literally losing out on free money."

"If you have other things you're saving for — like a family, house or baby — it's tough, but try to make it systematic," he adds. Setting up automatic deposits is one way to do that.

With that kind of slow and steady progress, you'll set yourself up to meet your goals by the end of the year.

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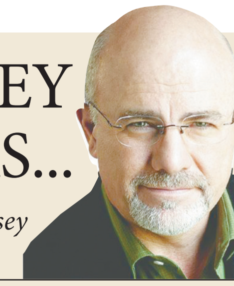
MONEY TALKS...

By Dave Ramsey



Get everything out in the open

Dear Dave,

My parents recently lost their home due to some very bad financial habits. They have always had financial problems, even though my father is smart and makes good money. They found another place to live, but since all this happened, my father has been constantly asking me for money.

He asks me to come over to talk about this when my husband is at work, and my mother isn't home. The last time, he even asked me to give him half of an inheritance I received from my grandparents. I'm really feeling guilty about everything. Can you help?

— Alicia

Dear Alicia,

I know this is a hard thing to talk about. It's an even harder situation to be in. Honestly, I think your brain knows exactly what needs to be done, but your heart is having a tough time handling it all.

What I'm going to say next will be difficult to hear. Your father is being manipulative. He's acting like a travel agent for guilt trips.

There's nothing wrong with doing a few, short-term things to help out your folks if they've been through a rough time. But something like this shouldn't become a habit, even with parents. And if you choose to help them out, you have every right to expect to make that help contingent on the fact they change the behaviors that put them in this situation.

There should be no more private meetings with your father, either. The next time he calls, you need to make sure he understands a meeting will only happen if your husband and mother are present. To this point, he's tried to hide all his sneaky behavior. This should be brought out into the open and stopped.

I know you love your parents, Alicia. That, along with your dad's behavior, is what's making this so difficult. But taking part in this sort of thing isn't going to help anyone. Plus, it's dishonest. Any financial help you give needs to have limits. No loans, either. Make it a gift.

You and your husband should agree on exactly what you're going to do, and how much you're willing to give. And it should be on your terms. Don't get involved in giving them money every month for the rest of their lives just because they're your parents. That's not how this is supposed to work.

— Dave

Dave Ramsey is a nine-time national best-selling author, personal finance expert and host of "The Ramsey Show." He has appeared on Good Morning America, CBS This Morning, Today, Fox News, CNN, Fox Business and many more. Since 1992, Dave has helped people take control of their money, build wealth and enhance their lives. He also serves as CEO for Ramsey Solutions.