



Autistics Need to

UNDERSTAND MONEY

I have been getting more and more questions about how to help children and young adults to understand money. Fortunately, when I was a child, I was taught about the value of money in elementary school. I was given fifty cents a week for allowance.

In the 1950's, I could buy quite a lot with it. There were choices. I could get either five Superman comics or ten candy bars. If I wanted a 69-cent toy plane with a propeller, I had to save for two weeks. Mother never bought the above items; they were "allowance items."

One of my favorite toys was a table hockey game with players that were moved with sliding rods. The game provided lots of opportunities to have fun

playing with another child. One day, I saw a hockey game in the window of the local toy store, which cost \$21. I calculated that buying that game would be almost a year's worth of my allowances. To understand money, I had to relate different amounts of money to real things.

In today's world, five dollars would buy a meal at McDonalds, and \$100 may buy a nice shirt and a pair of pants. A hardback book may cost \$25.

To understand huge amounts of money -- such as millions or billions of dollars -- I now relate it to real large things. The Denver Airport cost five billion dollars. When I read about government spending for different programs, I will ask myself, "Is that program worth two Denver Airports' worth of money?"

Understanding Money in a Cashless World

Having coins and paper money make decisions less abstract. Today, a child also has to learn that the debit card does not keep working forever. Many banks have debit card accounts for children. When the child goes shopping, s/he should look at the statement both before and after they buy something.

Another method to learn the value of money is calculating the hours a parent has to work at a job to buy different things. For example, at the gas station, the parent should tell the child the number of hours you have to work at your job to fill up the car with gas. When bags of groceries are brought home, tell your child the number of hours you had to work to pay for them. It makes it easier to connect the amounts of money to real things, because, when you talk about it, the child can understand that bags of groceries or any other purchased things related to money. ■



Temple is an internationally-respected specialist in designing livestock handling systems. She is also the most famous person with autism in the world today. She is the subject of the Emmy Award-winning HBO biopic *Temple Grandin*. She frequently writes and speaks on the subject of autism, sharing her personal experiences.