

Budget & Credit Solutions Press Release
For Immediate Release

A REAL VALENTINE'S PRESENT

Responsibly Handling Money is a Gift to Loved Ones

Austin, TX – Valentine's Day rolls around each year on February 14, regardless of economic conditions. This obvious lack of sensitivity on the part of Cupid, the mythical god of love, leaves many wondering how to show their affection without breaking the bank.

"If you find yourself in financial distress, perhaps the best gift this Valentine's Day is not to spend money on a token of your affection, but to provide your loved one with something that's not on sale at the stores: financial peace of mind," said George Merkle, President & CEO, Budget & Credit Solutions (BCS).

This type of financial peace is not based on the size of your bank account. Instead, it is handling expenses responsibly regardless of your financial situation. Putting the following actions in place will provide both you and your loved one with a better sense of financial stability, even in the hard times.

- **Get financially organized.** Send a calming signal to your loved one that you're on top of things. And, since it's tax season, this is the perfect time to shred what you don't need and file what you do.
- **Be realistic about the financial situation you're in.** If you've lost your job, it's irresponsible to continue spending as you did when employed. Learn to live within your means, and don't finance your lifestyle through credit.
- **Track your spending.** When every penny counts, it's important to count every penny. Doing so sends the signal that you have control over your money, something that mindless spending will never accomplish.
- **Create a personal cash-flow chart.** Using a calendar, list all paydays and anticipated amount of the paycheck. Next, list which bills are to be paid out of each check. This will help avoid last-minute scrambling to meet payment due dates, and incurring costly over limit and overdraft fees.
- **Find a way to save money.** A financial safety net in the form of a savings account is a calming factor when unexpected expenses occur. It's a comfort to know you're prepared. Start by having some of each check deposited into a savings account, and vow to not touch it except for true emergencies.
- **Bank any bonuses or windfall money.** You can't miss what you never had. This money can start or bulk up your savings account.

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- **Review the withholding allowances from your paycheck.** In recent years, millions of people have received an income tax refund of over \$2,000. Often, these same people struggle to make ends meet each month, and could have used an extra \$200 in their paycheck. Go to www.irs.gov and type in the words “withholding calculator” into the search box. In a matter of minutes you’ll see the appropriate withholding for your situation. Then, adjust your W4 accordingly.
- **If you get an income tax refund, use it wisely.** Catch up on any past due bills, make needed repairs to the house or car, put a portion into your savings account, and then splurge on something special for your loved one that is inexpensive.
- **Make the most of your money.**
 - Ditch your credit card if it has an annual fee attached, but first, make sure you are eligible for new credit. Issuers have tightened their lending standards, and you don’t want to be left without access to any credit.
 - Don’t use an ATM if it charges you a fee that is unreimbursed.
 - Bank where free checking is offered.
 - Put your money where it earns the most by finding the best rates available for savings and CDs. You can compare rates at www.bankrate.com.
 - Buy generic groceries, an average of 27 percent cheaper than their name-brand counterparts, and are often made by the same company.
 - Get back to the basics and start using coupons for items you normally buy.
 - Utilize any savings plans at work. If your company offers a Flexible Spending Account (FSA), but you’ve never bothered to investigate it, now’s the time. Taking advantage of the savings allowed by earmarking expenses to be paid through an FSA can result in real savings.
 - Make sure you’ve taken advantage of every tax credit and/or deduction available to you.

“Actions speak louder than words, and when your loved one sees your putting the above steps in place for greater financial security, he or she will know how much you care about them. This is definitely a Valentine’s present you can afford to give,” continued Mr. Merkle.

If you need help putting your financial life in order, reach out to a trained and certified credit counselor. To find BCS, call toll-free to 888.880.6337, or go online to www.debt.org.

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BCS is a member of the nation’s largest and longest serving national nonprofit credit counseling organization, the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, Inc. Their collective mission is to provide services to consumers to help them achieve financial wellness through financial management counseling, financial education and when appropriate debt reduction services through debt management plans. As a condition of membership, BCS is required to maintain high quality services through standards set by The Council on Accreditation and the NFCC.