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Counting Change – The Old Fashioned Way

I often hear from my peers that “kids these days” do not put emphasis on learning valuable life skills such as balancing a checkbook, living within a budget, or even counting back change. As I self-evaluate my own efforts to teach my teenage daughter these skills, I’m reminded that there is much room for improvement.

Counting change is a simple math concept. You pay cash for a purchase, the cashier hands you back the correct change, right? In our digital world, “plastic” has replaced cash for many consumers. While the “counting change” concept is used less and less in the everyday market place, it is still a much needed life skill for all. From a first job as a carhop at Sonic to the concession stand at the football game, our kids need to make correct change. Some of the first lessons in change making are taught at the elementary level, however without practice this skill often fades. I recently helped a friend who owns a restaurant and was embarrassed at how much I relied on the cash register to tell me how much change to give back.

I’d like to encourage you to take some time to practice this skill with your children (of all ages) this summer.

#1) Use the “counting up” method. If the total is \$8.91 and the customer hands you a \$20, start at \$8.91 and count money up to twenty. The simple process for this is to start with pennies to reach a multiple of five or ten. Next, use a nickel or dime as you get to a multiple of 25. Use quarters until you reach a dollar and then use one dollar bills until you reach a multiple of 5 or 10. This approach is important as you will be able to always count back change even without a cash register or calculator.

#2) Make it fun! From playing “restaurant” to setting up a lemonade stand, hands on learning is a great way to teach this concept.

#3) Practice, practice, practice. Anytime you pay cash, have your kids double check that you received the correct change back. This is a good concept for adults to practice as well to keep our skills sharpened.

Good luck, and happy counting!

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