



The Messy Meter

Do I Really Need That?: Money Fundamentals

Learning the difference between needs and wants is part of learning how to make sound decisions about money. Using a cut-and-paste technique on paper, kids will create an infographic showing pictures of their wants and needs, identifying which are most important to them.



Recommended Grades:
3 - 8

Estimated Time:
45 Minutes

Subject:
Financial Literacy

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

PANTRY STAPLES:

- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Pen, pencil, or marker

SPECIALTY SUPPLIES:

- Old magazines or newspapers
- Large sheet of paper or a poster board

STEPS

1. Start with a magazine or a newspaper that has a lot of photos and advertisements. Cut out pictures (about 15-20) of different types of objects or people: family, clothing and shoes (basic and designer), health care providers, electronic devices, a house, accessories and jewelry, water, food and drinks, books, school, cars, personal care products.
2. At the top center of your sheet of paper or poster board, write your name. To the left of it, write "Needs". To the right of your name, write "Wants".
3. Now attach your cutouts with glue or tape. Think about each cutout and decide if it's a want or a need. Then decide how important it is to you. Place items on either the want side or need side of the board, positioning them close to your name at the top if they are important. If they're less important, they can go lower. If they're not at all important to you, place them near the bottom.
4. Now that you have identified your needs and wants, make your best guess about how much money you would need to afford everything. First, estimate how much money it would take to pay for each of your needs. Are these one-time costs, or ongoing (meaning you would need to continue paying for every month)? Next, estimate how much money you would need to cover your wants. What is the total for each category, and what is the total overall? Look again at your list, are you missing anything important?

Bonus Fun: Look around your bedroom and make a list of 10 items, anything from furniture to electronic devices to pieces of clothing and shoes. For each item, think about why it was purchased. Was it a need or a want?

More Bonus Fun: For younger kids, give them 5-6 sticky notes, then ask them to place them next to the items that are most important based on how they've ranked them. Have them imagine that the things they place the notes next to they can have, and those they do not, they can not have. This may mean choosing a home over a car, or a doctor's visit over a new pair of shoes.

Go Further: For older kids, once you've identified your needs and wants you can start to think about developing a budget, including tracking your income and expenses. To learn more about how to create a budget, look at the curriculum, My Financial Future, and complete the activities, Managing Your Money Flow and Bringing Home the Bacon.



Questions to Engage Youth:

What is the difference between a need and a want?

What did this activity show you about yourself?

How does distinguishing between needs and wants affect your purchasing decisions?

How do needs and wants affect your family's purchases?

What will you do differently now that you understand needs and wants?

Explanation:

Needs can be ranked in five categories, listed in order of greatest importance to least: physical (things like food and water), safety (such as having safe place to live), social (love), self-esteem (recognition by others) and self-actualization (developing your greatest potential with new experiences). "Wants" is the word for

many things that fall outside of those categories, like ice cream or video games, or the desire to be the most popular in school.

Understanding needs versus wants can help when deciding the best way to spend your money.

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