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Kat's Money Corner | Love and lessons from a first-time mom

By KAT

One thing I know that I didn't know last year at this time: No amount of research and planning can prepare you for every twist, turn and surprise that parenthood brings. Now with Jack's first birthday is coming up, here are some things – financial and otherwise – that I've learned in my first year as a mom.

Family/Friend support can never be underestimated! We have been so blessed this past year to have friends hand down toys, and offered lots of advice, and even babysitting! Financial lesson: don't be afraid to ask for help – and when your children are older, remember to pay it forward.

Parents as Teachers is awesome! It is a free service offered by your school district. In Olathe Public Schools where we live, we have a "Parent Educator" that comes to our house once per month and does a consultation with Jack and us to assess his development and help us keep him on track. Sometimes there is a waiting list to have the in-home consultations, but once you sign up they also have educational classes you can attend for free. Financial lesson: research the reputable free resources available to new parents, and take advantage of them.

Babies get sick! Doctors cost money! We have been lucky enough that Jack hasn't caught anything worse than a cold virus (knock on wood) but we still took him to the doctor just to be sure. And although nothing was prescribed, we felt better knowing it was not something more serious. Financial lesson: as soon as you know you're expecting, research your health benefit plan thoroughly, know what's covered, and make arrangements to have your new addition included in your plan.

The best-made plans don't always work out! We really wanted to do homemade baby food. I read up on it, saved the recipes, but when it came down to it I just never did it. I would buy some baby food and think, "Next time, I'll make it." Next time never came with Jack...Maybe with the next baby? Financial lesson: build some slack into your budget. Especially for first-time new parents, there's a learning curve, and as much as I preach against paying for convenience, at times it is unavoidable. Speaking of which ...

I think our biggest break from our pre-baby budget has been in the dining-out category. By the time we pick the baby up from daycare and get home it is 6 p.m. or later, and Jack goes to bed around 7 or 7:30. We do takeout at least one extra day per week just because it is easier to walk in the door, eat, and then still have some time to play with him before he goes down for the night. Financial lesson: think long-term and remember what's important. I have no doubt that the long-term benefit of the play time we spend with Jack is far more valuable than the money we would have saved if we spent that time cooking instead of interacting with him. But as he gets older, I'll want to modify so that we're not falling into the trap where he's eating too many fast food meals (knock on wood again).

So one year down and a whole lot more to go. I am sure next year at this time I will have a whole new slew of lessons to share about being a mom.

Kat's Money Corner is posted on Dollars & Sense every Tuesday. Kat Hnatyshyn, when not blogging or caring for her little one, is a manager with CommunityAmerica Credit Union.

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