

Tips from our Credit Counselors

Consumer Credit Counseling Services of NH & VT asked its credit counselors to share their top five tips for consumers in today's economy.

[Watch Ernie Jones, one of our counselors, give you his tips!](#)

1. Track expenses to set up a realistic budget. (If you need help doing this, check out our [downloadable flexible daily expense worksheet](#) and budgeting basics brochure.) These are excellent tools to help you build your personalized budget. In addition, you can always schedule a free appointment with one of our professionally certified counselors who can help you build a realistic household budget.
2. Make budgeting a family affair. Include your children and spouse in building your budget, identifying goals and taking the necessary steps to reach those goals. When all members of your household actively participate in building a budget, there is better communication and understanding around personal finances and more collaboration in reaching your desired goals.
3. Enroll in utility budget plans for electric heat and gas. If you have a fixed income, sometimes it is easier when you know your living expenses will also be somewhat fixed. By enrolling in a budget plan with your utility, heat and gas companies, you can average your annual expenses for these line items and spread the cost over a 12 month period. This will help you avoid getting very high heating and oil bills in the winter. You will be paying for your heat all year round, thus assuring consistency in your bill.
4. Set up an automatic savings plan (every little bit counts). When the bills pile up it is very difficult to think about saving money but most people can save at least a small amount. By setting up an automatic savings plan that transfers money directly into a savings account for you, you can start saving on a regular basis. With time you will see your savings build up. Participating in your company's 401k plan is a great way to start. In addition, creating a savings habit can help you build a reserve account for unexpected expenses or a fun family goal like going on a trip.
5. Always read pay stubs, credit card statements and deposit tickets. Make sure you review all your financial statements when you receive them in the mail or get them electronically. Review them to make sure all the charges are accurate and reconcile your expenses against your budget. Contact the appropriate company immediately if you see erroneous information in any of your statements, and follow up in writing about your discrepancies.