

# Activity 5: Family Budgets

GRADES 3-12

GSE

GSE Standard Alignment:  
Social Studies/ELA



45 - 60 min.



This activity can be paired with **Food and Life** and **Who is Food Insecure and How Access Defines What We Eat**.

## Student Learning

This activity explores the relationship between household income and food security. It also identifies both community and government responses to hunger and poverty. Students will learn about the daily challenges millions of people face in this country.

## Objectives

Students will have increased awareness about the gap that often exists between wages and expenses.

Students will gain a deeper understanding of the community and government responses to food insecurity in the United States.

## Materials

- Copies of Family Scenarios
- Poverty Guidelines Chart
- Potential Government Responses to Hunger
- Pens/Pencils
- Calculators
- Flipchart Paper or Whiteboard
- Markers

## Performance Tasks

Divide the class into small groups of two or three.

Give each group a family scenario. Instructors should be sure that all ten family scenarios are represented at least once.

Each scenario will describe a household and the household's size, health states, income and expenses.

It is VERY important that the instructor is circulating during this time to make sure that groups are on task and that all group members understand the objective and have equal opportunity to participate.

Ask students to add up all their expenses and subtract these from their starting income. The amount left over is the income they can use toward food and other expenses.

After they have completed the activity, have students share different scenarios and the challenges that each household might be facing.

Share with the class that on average a person would need between \$290 and \$375 per month for food groceries.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-monthly-reports>

Have the students brainstorm what other expenses a family might have. For example, diapers, cleaning supplies, car repair, etc.

Together or in groups, select one or two of the scenarios and have students take the amount leftover at the end of the month and divide it by 30 to determine how much money there is for the entire household to spend on food per day. Then take that number and divide it by the number of people in the household to determine how much each person has for food per day.

### Discussion Questions

- What insights or surprises did you experience while working with your family scenario and budget?

*Facilitator Note: I wasn't able to pay all my bills, I wouldn't have enough money to keep my lights on, I don't know how I would get to work?*

- What other necessary items would these families need each month?

*Facilitator Note: Cleaning supplies, toiletries, vitamins, laundry soap and services, dental care, field trips, etc*

- In the 1970's, a parent earning minimum wage (the federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25) could feed their children and pay for housing. What has changed? *Facilitator Note: Expenses like housing, healthcare, food and fuel have all skyrocketed. Wages have not kept up with the cost of living. An increasing number of people don't have healthcare coverage with work and*

*health care bills are now the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States.*

- How could some of the government responses to hunger help the families in this activity? *Facilitator Note: Many of these families have no money left over for food and SNAP and WIC are federal programs that increase access to nutritious food. Most of these families are in working households, the Earned Income Tax Credit for low to middle income working families might help create financial stability. Families with children may be eligible for free or reduced priced meals at school. See Potential Government Responses Sheet (p. 40).*
- What are some challenges families might face trying to sign up for government programs? *Facilitator Note: Families may not know about these programs or how to apply. People might not have internet access or transportation. If people are working, they might not be able to leave work to meet an appointment or to apply.*
- What community responses to hunger might be able to help these families? *Facilitator Note: Families might visit a food pantry or a community kitchen in their region to get some supplemental food; or they might find a community-based program that provides rent assistance or help with non-food necessities.*
- If you or someone you know needs food, how could you help? Do you know what community services are available near you? How might you find out?

### *Facilitator Note:*

- *You could contact a regional food bank to get a list of pantries and other programs in your area. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>*
- *The United Way has a 211 hotline that can connect families to community services: <https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/featured-programs/2-1-1#>*
- *In the metro-Atlanta and north Georgia region, the Atlanta Community Food Bank has an agency locator map: <https://www.acfb.org/get-help/> and a Text for Help system: Text **findfood** (all one word) or **comida** to **888-976-2232** to get a list of pantries near you.*

## **Extension Ideas**

### **Graph Expense**

Create a pie graph to determine and illustrate the percentage of monthly income that each expense utilized.

### **Impact of Geography**

Have students explore how location can impact a family's budget. Research cost of living in various parts of the country: e.g. Atlanta compared to New York City, San Francisco or Birmingham. Choose different family scenarios from this activity and have students determine how differences in the cost of housing and other expenses that impact the monthly budget.

What about families living in rural areas?

### **Navigating Assistance**

Individually or in small groups, using family scenarios 1, 2 and/or 7, research the steps involved for a household seeking

community or government assistance in your area. Share and discuss findings as a class or have students create reports.

### Questions to explore:

- Where can they apply for the federal nutrition programs SNAP or WIC?
- How do you find out if they are eligible?
- What does a person need to know and/or bring with them?
- Is there a food pantry near you? When are they open?
- Would they be able to visit a pantry or apply for SNAP and not miss work?

# FAMILY SCENARIO #1

## Who You Are

You and your spouse live in a large metropolitan area and have three children ages 2, 5 and 8.

You and your spouse have health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and your three children are eligible for and enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). You are only required to pay co-pays for your 8-year-old.

You were recently diagnosed with high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Your doctor recommended you reduce sugar, fat and salt in your diet and increase fruits and vegetables.

One of you works for \$15/hour and one of you works for \$13/hour.

You both work full time and your combined monthly pre-tax income is \$4,480.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two-bedroom apartment)	\$1,700
2. Utilities (electricity, gas, water and phone)	\$200
3. Phone (2 cell phones)	\$60
4. Transportation (2 monthly bus passes)	\$190
5. Childcare (one in day care, two in after-school)	\$1030
6. Medical (health insurance plus co-pays)	\$253
7. Income Taxes	\$1025
Total of expenses	\$

Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?



# FAMILY SCENARIO #2

## Who You Are

You and your spouse live in a small city within a large metropolitan area. You have two small children ages 2 and 4, and you are expecting your third child soon. Your 2-year-old is in daycare and your 4-year-old is in state-funded pre-k.

You and your spouse have health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and your children are covered by the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). This pregnancy has involved significant complications, including a hospital stay and gestational diabetes.

You both work full time. One of you works for \$13/hour and one of you works for \$12.50/hour. Your combined monthly income is \$4,080.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two-bedroom apartment)	\$1440
2. Utilities	\$203
3. Phone (2 pre-paid cell phones)	\$30
4. Transportation (car insurance and gas)	\$277
5. Childcare	\$750
6. Medical (insurance)	\$413
7. Income Taxes	\$933
Total of expenses	\$

Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?



# FAMILY SCENARIO #3

## Who You Are

You are a couple living in an unincorporated community outside of a large metropolitan city. You have three children ages 1, 5, and 8.

Your children are eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP).

You and your partner currently have no health coverage.

You both work full time. One of you works for \$15/hour and the other works for \$12/hour.

Your combined monthly income is \$4,320.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (three-bedroom apartment)	\$1730
2. Utilities	\$170
3. Phone (2 cell phones)	\$80
4. Transportation (gas and car insurance)	\$350
5. Childcare (1 in daycare, 2 in after-school)	\$1000
6. Income Taxes	\$988

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
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Minus total of expenses	-\$
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Amount left over for food	\$
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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

# FAMILY SCENARIO #4

## Who You Are

You are a retired couple who own a home in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city. You are both 71 years old and have been married 40 years. You and your spouse live alone but take care of your grandchildren after school and on the weekends. You assist with meals and school supplies for your grandchildren.

You have a combined fixed monthly income of \$2000 from Social Security.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Utilities	\$375
2. Phone (landline)	\$36
3. Transportation (car insurance & gas)	\$350
4. Childcare	\$200
5. Medical (Medicare, supplemental insurance, and two prescriptions)	\$420
6. Property Taxes, home maintenance, and insurance	\$467.50

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
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Minus total of expenses	-\$
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Amount left over for food	\$
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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

# FAMILY SCENARIO #5

## Who You Are

You are a 65-year-old grandmother raising 2 grandchildren ages 9 and 11.

You live in a small city in the Southeast.

You receive a monthly disability check of \$1150, a special TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) payment of \$310/month and you receive a Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Monthly Subsidy payment of \$200/month. Your total monthly income is \$1,660.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two-bedroom apartment)	\$973
2. Utilities	\$175
3. Phone (pre-paid cell phone)	\$15
4. Transportation (car insurance & gas)	\$450
5. Medical (Medicare Part A & Medicaid)	\$0

Total of expenses \$

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Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?



# FAMILY SCENARIO #6

## Who You Are

You are a couple with two small children ages 2 and 4. You pay a mortgage on a small home in a community south of a large metropolitan area.

You have health insurance through work but must pay for your spouse. Both children qualify for, and are covered by, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP).

You were recently in the hospital and diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.

You both work full time for \$17/hour and have a combined monthly income of \$5,440.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Mortgage (interest, property tax, and homeowners' insurance)	\$1552
2. Utilities	\$200
3. Phone (2 cell phones)	\$80
4. Transportation (1 car note, gas, and car insurance)	\$450
5. Childcare (two in day care/receive discount)	\$1050
6. Medical (health insurance, hospital bill, and prescriptions)	\$833
7. Income Taxes	\$1245

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
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Minus total of expenses	-\$
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Amount left over for food	\$
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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

# FAMILY SCENARIO #7

## Who You Are

You are married and have two children, ages 3 and 6. You live in a large metropolitan area in the Southeast and use public transportation.

You & your spouse have a high deductible health plan through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) & your children are covered by the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

You both work full time. One of you works for \$13/hour and one of you works for \$14/hour, and your combined monthly income is \$4,320.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two-bedroom apartment)	\$1830
2. Utilities	\$296
3. Phone (2 cell phones)	\$80
4. Transportation (two monthly bus passes)	\$190
5. Childcare (one in day care, one in after-school care)	\$900
6. Income Taxes	\$988

Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
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Minus total of expenses	-\$
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Amount left over for food	\$
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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?



# FAMILY SCENARIO #8

## Who You Are

You are 70 years old.

You live alone in an apartment partially funded by the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) program in an unincorporated community outside of a large metropolitan city.

You also receive a discount (LIHEAP) for your utilities. You have a fixed Social Security monthly income of \$1,300.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (one bedroom apartment)	\$700
2. Utilities	\$75
3. Phone (pre-paid cell phone)	\$15
4. Transportation (public as needed)	\$30
5. Medical (Medicare and Medicaid)	\$0

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Total of expenses \$

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Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

# FAMILY SCENARIO #9

## Who You Are

You are a single parent of three children ages 3, 7, and 9. You live in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city.

Your youngest child participates in a Head Start program (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)). Your mother watches your two oldest children until you come home from work.

You work full time for \$16/hour. Your monthly income is \$2,560.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (two-bedroom apartment)	\$1600
2. Utilities	\$175
3. Phone (1 cell phone)	\$40
4. Transportation (public transportation and rideshare service)	\$200
5. Childcare (3-year-old in Head Start Program)	\$0
6. Income Taxes	\$508

Total of expenses \$

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Monthly income	\$
Minus total of expenses	-\$
Amount left over for food	\$

If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?



# FAMILY SCENARIO #10

## Who You Are

You are a single parent living in a small city with your three children ages 3, 6, and 7. Your 3-year-old participates in Head Start (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center program (ECLKC)). Your 6- and 7-year-olds are in after-school care.

Your three children are eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), and you only pay a co-pay for the 7-year-old.

You work full-time for \$20/hour and your monthly income is \$3,200.

## Monthly Expenses

1. Rent (one bedroom apartment)	\$1700
2. Utilities	\$175
3. Phone (1 cell phone)	\$40
4. Transportation (car insurance and gas)	\$300
5. Childcare (one in Headstart, two in after care)	\$275
6. Medical	\$0
7. Income Taxes	\$636
Total of expenses	\$
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Monthly income	\$
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Minus total of expenses	-\$
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Amount left over for food	\$
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If you subtract the total of your expenses from your monthly income, how much money do you have left to purchase food?

- What other things would your family need to purchase monthly? (Cleaning and laundry supplies, toiletries, doctor's visits, etc.)
- Are there expenses on your list that (even before buying food) you won't have money to pay for?
- How might the health conditions mentioned above impact your family's budget?
- Which bills are the most important?
- See Poverty Guidelines Chart – is your family's income above, at or below the poverty line?

# POVERTY GUIDELINES CHART

Number in Family	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$15,650	\$19,550	\$17,990
2	\$21,150	\$26,430	\$24,320
3	\$26,650	\$33,310	\$30,650
4	\$32,150	\$40,190	\$36,980
5	\$37,650	\$47,070	\$43,310
6	\$43,150	\$53,950	\$49,640
7	\$48,650	\$60,830	\$55,970
8	\$54,150	\$67,710	\$62,300
Each Additional	+\$5,500	+\$6,880	+\$6,330

U.S Department of Health and Human Services, January 2025.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

# POTENTIAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSES SHEET

Note: These responses are specific to Georgia. If in another state, please check your state's eligibility criteria as it varies some by state.

## Scenario #1

Potentially eligible for:

- PeachCare (Georgia Only)
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- Energy assistance (if available)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Child Tax Credit
- Reduced Price School Meals

## Scenario #2

Potentially eligible for:

- PeachCare (Georgia Only)
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- Energy assistance (if available)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Child Tax Credit
- Reduced Price School Meals

## Scenario #3

Potentially eligible for:

- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)
- PeachCare (Georgia Only)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Child Tax Credit
- Reduced School Meals

## Scenario #4

Potentially eligible for:

- SNAP (formerly Food Stamps)
- Medicare
- Energy assistance(if available)
- Aging Services
- CSFP (Commodity Supplemental Food Program)

## Scenario #5

Potentially eligible for:

- SNAP (formerly Food Stamps)
- Medicaid for 9-year-old, 11-year-old
- PeachCare (Georgia Only)
- Energy Assistance (If available)
- Aging Services
- Free School Meals
- Grandparent Raising Grandchildren payments

## Scenario #6

Potentially eligible for:

- Peachcare (Georgia Only)
- S-CHIP
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)

## Scenario #7

Potentially eligible for:

- Peachcare (Georgia Only)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Child Tax Credit

## Scenario #8

Potentially eligible for:

- SNAP (formerly food stamps)
- Medicaid
- Energy assistance
- TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)
- Aging Services
- CSFP (Commodity Supplemental Food Program)

## Scenario #9

Potentially eligible for:

- SNAP (formerly food stamps)
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- Medicaid
- Peachcare (Georgia Only)
- Subsidized childcare and energy assistance (if available)
- TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Free School Meals

## Scenario #10

Potentially eligible for:

- WIC for 3-year-old
- Medicaid for 3-year-old
- Peachcare for 6-year-old and 7-year-old (Georgia Only)
- Subsidized childcare and energy assistance (if available)
- EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)

It is important to recognize that being “potentially eligible” does not mean that people will have easy access to these benefits. Applying for these benefits is time consuming and often requires taking time off of work. Additionally, applicants may not meet all eligibility requirements.