

# The Before-18 Financial Checklist

*Twelve boxes. Check them all before your 18th birthday and you launch years ahead of almost every adult you know.*

☐ **Learn the 5-second scam test**

Gift cards, secrets, and urgency are the tells. If any one shows up, stop and tell an adult.

☐ **Open a teen savings account with no fees**

Credit unions are the teen-friendliest. Set up direct deposit on day one of the job.

☐ **Read one full pay stub**

Find gross pay, FICA, and net. Know what each deduction is buying before you ignore it.

☐ **Fill out your own W-4**

Check whether “exempt” applies to you. It has to be renewed every February.

☐ **File your first tax return**

Even a refund-only return counts. It builds the record and the habit while stakes are tiny.

☐ **Track every dollar of cash earnings**

Babysitting and mowing count. Records are what prove the income that unlocks a Roth IRA.

☐ **Open and fund a custodial Roth IRA**

Even \$50. The account existing is the win; the compounding does the rest.

☐ **Buy your first index fund**

And learn what you own. Boring is the strategy, not a compromise.

☐ **Become an authorized user on a well-run card**

Only if that card is paid on time and kept well under its limit. Confirm first.

☐ **Read a credit report together**

Free at AnnualCreditReport.com. At 18 the file becomes yours — take over the freeze.

☐ **Run your college math before borrowing**

Loans are the last row, not the first. Compare net price across four years.

☐ **Have the money talk with your parents**

Who pays for what at 18, 20, 22. Awkward for ten minutes, clarifying for years.

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**Parents: this list is the hand-off.**

Your teen drives; you approve accounts and co-sign where the law requires. Each box is a system that compounds — the account receives money, the stub and W-4 protect it, the return recovers it, the records unlock the Roth, the Roth compounds for five decades, and the credit file ages quietly. Do them roughly in order; each one makes the next easier.

*The full guide, with links for every box: [earlylifeinvestments.com/education/before-18-checklist.html](https://earlylifeinvestments.com/education/before-18-checklist.html)*