A YYZ MORTGAGE GUIDE · NO. 05

05

Money Smarts, Toronto Edition

Everyday moves for getting ahead in Canada's most expensive city

YYZ MORTGAGE

yyz.mortgage · Checked & current as of August 2026

BEFORE YOU START

The short version

> *Who this is for: You live (and spend) in the GTA and want the boring, effective habits — not crypto tips.*

1. Automate money the day after payday — the system remembers so you don't have to.
2. Emergency fund first: $1,000, then 3–6 months of must-pays. Kill 20% credit-card debt before chasing 7% returns.
3. The account order: employer match → FHSA (if a home's possible) → TFSA ($7K/yr, up to $109K room) → more RRSP.
4. Kids? The RESP grant is a guaranteed 20% — up to $7,200 of free money per child. Don't leave it on the table.
5. Sleep on everything, verify everyone (FSRA/CSA lookups are free), and phone to confirm wire details. Urgency is the tell.

Read it cover to cover, or jump straight to the chapter that answers your question — every chapter stands on its own. The examples are labelled illustrations, the numbers were checked in August 2026, and nothing in here is a sales pitch. When you're ready for a human, we're on the last page.

What's inside

Hi there 4

1. Know your number 4

2. The emergency fund (your anti-panic button) 6

3. Credit score care (ten minutes a month) 7

4. The account alphabet — TFSA, RRSP, FHSA 8

5. The RESP — a 20% raise on your kid's education 10

6. Debt, in the right order 12

7. Investing, without getting fancy 14

8. Insurance — buy what protects you, skip the rest 15

9. Renting smart (while you save) 17

10. Homeowner money habits (GTA edition) 18

11. Retirement, in plain words 19

12. New to Canada? Start here 20

13. Scams and traps (Toronto's greatest hits) 21

14. Raising kids who aren't weird about money 23

15. The habits, assembled 23

16. Money questions, answered plainly 24

Word list 27

Your one-page plan 28

Where these numbers come from 29

The fine print (the honest kind) 30

Hi there

Toronto is a wonderful, ridiculous place to build a life. World-class food, lake sunsets, forty minutes of traffic to go eight kilometres, and some of the highest living costs in the country.

Getting ahead here is possible. Plenty of regular people do it, not with secrets or crypto tips, but with a handful of boring habits done consistently. This book is those habits, in plain words, tuned for life in the GTA.

We'll cover the accounts that hand you free government money, the debt order that actually works, how to buy insurance without getting sold junk, and the scams that target this city hardest.

No lectures, and no shame about lattes.

CHAPTER 1

Know your number

Most money stress comes from not knowing where the money goes. So, one time, find out. Pull up the last two months of bank and card statements and sort spending into three buckets:

1. **Must-pay:** rent or mortgage, utilities, groceries, transit, insurance, minimum debt payments.
2. **Chose-to-pay:** eating out, subscriptions, shopping, trips.
3. **Future-you:** savings, investments, extra debt payments.

A healthy rough shape is about half your take-home pay on must-pays, and a solid slice, ideally 20%, going to future-you. In Toronto, housing

alone can blow up that math, so don't panic if you're not there. The point isn't perfection. The point is that you *know*, because you can't steer what you don't see.

Then automate it. The day after payday, money moves by itself: some to savings, some to debt. What's left is genuinely yours to spend. This "pay yourself first" trick works because it doesn't rely on willpower. Willpower has a bad attendance record.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE – NOT AN ACTUAL CLIENT

Sana kept "failing at budgeting." Every app, every spreadsheet — abandoned by February. So she quit budgeting and started plumbing. The day after each payday, $500 a month flows to savings and $150 extra goes at her credit card, automatically. She gave herself full permission to spend whatever's left, guilt-free. Eighteen months later: the card sits at zero and her savings hold $9,000. She still hasn't "budgeted" once. The system remembers so she doesn't have to.

One more free win: hunt your subscriptions. Once a year, scan twelve months of statements for things you forgot you pay for. Most households find $40 to $100 a month of ghosts. That's a vacation.

CHECK IT YOURSELF

The federal consumer agency's free Budget Planner builds the three buckets for you, no signup: **itools-ioutils.fcac-acfc.gc.ca — Budget Planner**.

CHAPTER 2

The emergency fund (your anti-panic button)

Before investing, before extra debt payments, before anything fancy: build a cash cushion.

- **Starter goal:** $1,000. This turns most of life's surprises into annoyances.
- **Real goal:** three to six months of must-pay expenses, in a high-interest savings account you don't touch.

Why does it matter so much? Without a cushion, every surprise lands on a credit card at 20%+ interest. One bad month can undo a year of progress. With a cushion, a transmission failure is just a bad Tuesday.

Where to keep it. A high-interest savings account at a bank or credit union, not your chequing account, where it'll get spent by accident, and not in stocks, where it might be down 20% exactly when you need it. Boring is the feature. Look for a separate account with no debit card attached.

Homeowners, note: houses generate their own emergencies. Furnaces die in January, on purpose. A good rule is to set aside about 1% of your home's value per year for repairs. Some homeowners also keep an unused line of credit as a second layer of backup. Set it up while times are good. That's when banks say yes.

CHAPTER 3

Credit score care (ten minutes a month)

Your credit score, a number from 300 to 900, prices everything you borrow. A strong score can save you tens of thousands over a mortgage's life. The recipe is short:

- **Pay every bill on time, every time.** Payment history is the biggest factor. Automate minimums so a busy month can't hurt you.
- **Keep card balances under about 30% of the limit.** Even if you pay in full, a card that *reports* nearly maxed drags your score. Under 10% is even better.
- **Let accounts age.** Your oldest card is doing quiet good work. Keep it open with a small recurring charge.
- **Don't collect new credit for points and perks** right before a big application.
- **Check your reports** with Equifax and TransUnion once a year (free) and dispute anything wrong. Errors are more common than you'd think.

Rate-shopping for a mortgage or car? Relax — inquiries for the same purpose get grouped and counted as one. The window varies by scoring model, from about two weeks up to about 45 days, so do your shopping within a couple of weeks and you're fine.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE – NOT AN ACTUAL CLIENT

Rahim had never missed a payment in his life, so he'd never bothered looking at his credit reports. Then a car loan came back at a rate that didn't match the one his co-worker had just been quoted. He finally pulled both reports, free. Equifax was spotless. TransUnion showed a $312 collections item from a phone account he'd closed years earlier, when the final bill went to an apartment he'd already moved out of. He disputed it, attached the closing confirmation, and waited. It took about eleven weeks to come off, and his score jumped roughly 40 points the month it did. The error wasn't his fault. Finding it was still his job, and only checking one bureau would have missed it completely.

If you have no credit at all (new to Canada, or just never borrowed): get a secured credit card, put one small recurring bill on it, pay it in full every month, and leave it alone. Twelve months of that builds a usable file. It's slow and it works.

CHAPTER 4

The account alphabet — TFSA, RRSP, FHSA

Three letters-heavy accounts, one simple job each. These are containers, not investments — inside each one you choose what to hold, from savings to index funds. This is the part people get wrong: opening a TFSA and leaving it in cash isn't investing, it's just a savings account wearing a hat.

TFSA: the everything account. You put in money you've already paid tax on, and then it grows tax-free forever. Withdraw anytime, for

anything, tax-free. New room is added every year — $7,000 for 2026. If you've never contributed and were 18 or older back in 2009, your total room is $109,000. For most people, this is the default place to invest.

Two warnings. Don't over-contribute: the penalty is 1% per month, and it adds up fast. And know the re-contribution rule: if you withdraw, that room doesn't come back until **January 1 of the next year**. People get dinged every year for putting money back the same year they took it out. Your CRA My Account shows your exact room.

CHECK IT YOURSELF

Your personal contribution room (TFSA and RRSP both) is in **CRA My Account**; the current year's limits and rules are at **CRA — TFSA**.

RRSP: the retirement account. Contributions lower this year's taxable income — hello, refund. The money then grows untaxed until you take it out in retirement, when your tax rate is likely lower.

The RRSP shines when your employer **matches** contributions. That match is an instant, guaranteed return on your money. Never leave it on the table. It also shines most for higher earners, because the deduction is worth more the higher your tax bracket. If you're early in your career and earning modestly, filling the TFSA first often makes more sense, and you can hold RRSP room for later, when your income is higher.

First-time buyers can also borrow up to $60,000 from their own RRSP through the Home Buyers' Plan, repaid over 15 years.

FHSA: the first-home account. Don't own a home, but might someday? This is the best deal in Canadian personal finance. Contributions cut your taxes like an RRSP ($8,000 a year, $40,000 lifetime). A qualifying first-home withdrawal is completely tax-free, like

a TFSA. Both halves win. And if a home never happens, the money rolls into your RRSP without losing a thing.

Renters: open one, even with $50. Room only starts building after the account exists.

A sensible order for most people:

A SENSIBLE ORDER FOR MOST PEOPLE

1. Employer match – free money, take it first
2. Starter emergency fund – $1,000
3. Kill high-interest debt – cards, payday loans
4. FHSA – if a first home is anywhere on your horizon
5. TFSA – $7,000 of new room in 2026
6. More RRSP – especially as your income climbs

Your situation may differ. That's what advice is for.

Work down the list. Most people never get past step four, and that's fine.

CHAPTER 5

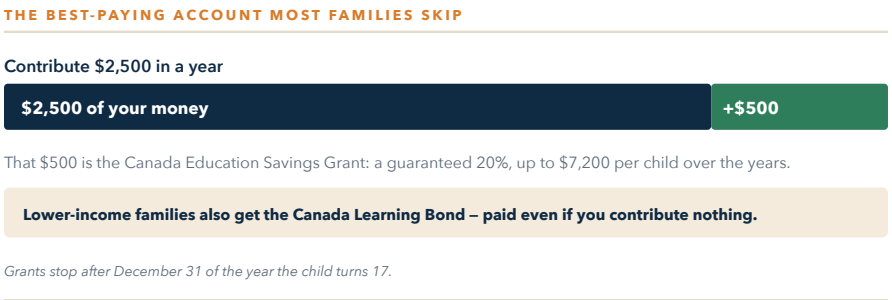
The RESP — a 20% raise on your kid's education

If you have children, this is the highest-return account available to ordinary Canadians, and a shocking number of families skip it.

How it works. You put money into a Registered Education Savings Plan for a child. The federal government adds a grant on top, the **Canada Education Savings Grant**, worth **20% of what you**

contribute, up to $500 a year per child, to a **lifetime maximum of $7,200**.

Twenty percent. Immediately. There's no investment on earth that reliably pays you 20% for showing up.



The grant is the return. You don't have to pick clever investments to collect it.

The numbers you need:

- Contribute $2,500 in a year → get the full $500 grant
- Lifetime contribution limit: $50,000 per child
- Missed years carry forward. You can catch up one extra year at a time — contribute $5,000 in a year and collect $1,000 of grant
- Grants stop after December 31 of the year the child turns 17, and the last couple of years have extra conditions, so don't leave it to the end
- **Lower-income families get more**: an enhanced grant rate on the first portion contributed, plus the **Canada Learning Bond**, which pays into an RESP even if you contribute nothing at all. If money is tight, this is the one to ask about. It's free and it's missed constantly.

What if the child doesn't go to school? You get your own contributions back. The grants go back to the government. The growth can often be moved into your RRSP if you have room, or withdrawn

with extra tax. Not a disaster, and "school" includes college, trades, and apprenticeships, not just university.

CHECK IT YOURSELF

Grant rules and the Canada Learning Bond (free money for lower-income families, no contribution needed) are at **canada.ca — education savings**. Not sure what you qualify for? The **Benefits Finder** checks every federal program in a few anonymous questions.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE – NOT AN ACTUAL CLIENT

Theo and Dee set up an RESP when their daughter was born and put in $200 a month — $2,400 a year, close to the sweet spot. Every year the government added roughly $480. Over eighteen years their own contributions totalled about $43,000, the grants added about $7,200, and growth did the rest. They didn't pick clever investments. They just didn't skip the free 20%.

CHAPTER 6

Debt, in the right order

Not all debt is the same animal.

- **High-interest debt** (credit cards, payday loans, buy-now-pay-later gone wrong) is a house fire. Put it out first, before serious investing. No investment reliably beats the guaranteed 20%+ you save by clearing a card.
- **Middle debt** (car loans, lines of credit) — steady payments, and think hard before rolling it into longer-term borrowing just to lower the payment.

- **Mortgage debt** is the marathon. Low rate, long timeline. Extra payments help, but usually *after* the fire is out and the tax-sheltered accounts are working.

Two payoff methods, both fine: **avalanche** (highest rate first, best math) or **snowball** (smallest balance first, best motivation). The one you'll stick with is the right one.

A word on payday loans: they are the most expensive money in Canada, priced in a way that makes 20% credit card interest look generous. If you're using them, a credit counselling agency (the non-profit kind) can usually build a better plan for free. Ontario has them, and they don't charge you to talk.

And a Toronto-specific big-ticket truth: a car is often the second-largest expense a household has. Payment, insurance (GTA premiums are brutal), gas, parking — easily $1,000+ a month all-in. If your life works on the TTC or GO plus the occasional rental and rideshare, the car you *don't* own might fund your entire down payment. Not preachy, just math worth running once.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE – NOT AN ACTUAL CLIENT

Jordan, 28, lives in the Junction, two blocks from a streetcar. One bored Sunday he added up the car: $520 lease, $410 insurance (young driver, Toronto rates), plus gas and parking. About $1,250 a month, for a machine that mostly sat there. He let the lease end. Transit pass, car-share membership, the odd weekend rental, and $1,000 a month of the difference flows automatically into his FHSA and TFSA. Five years of that is $60,000 plus growth. A down payment, driven nowhere.

CHAPTER 7

Investing, without getting fancy

You don't need to be clever. You need to be consistent, cheap, and patient. Four ideas cover most of it.

1. Fees matter more than you think. A fund charging 2% a year versus one charging 0.2% doesn't sound like much. Over thirty years, that gap can eat a large share of your final balance. Ask what you're paying — the number is called the MER — and know that many bank mutual funds sit near the high end while broad index funds and ETFs sit near the low end.

2. Spread out. Owning a broad, diversified basket of investments beats betting on a few names. One simple, globally diversified fund is a perfectly respectable entire portfolio. Boring wins.

3. Don't try to time it. Money invested steadily, month after month, through good markets and bad, beats waiting for the "right moment" for almost everyone who tries. Automate the contribution and stop watching.

4. Match the risk to the timeline. Money you need in two years shouldn't be in the stock market. Money you won't touch for twenty-five years shouldn't be sitting in cash losing to inflation.

On advice: it's fine to want help. Just ask any advisor two questions, *How are you paid?* and *Are you required to act in my best interest?*, and understand the answers before you sign anything. And you can check whether anyone selling investments is registered, free, at **aretheyregistered.ca** — the Canadian Securities Administrators' official lookup.

LOOK IT UP

Ontario's securities regulator runs a plain-language investor education site — fee calculators, product explainers, scam alerts, no sales pitch: **getsmarteraboutmoney.ca**.

CHAPTER 8

Insurance — buy what protects you, skip the rest

Insurance exists to cover things you couldn't afford to pay for yourself. That's it. Anything else is a subscription.

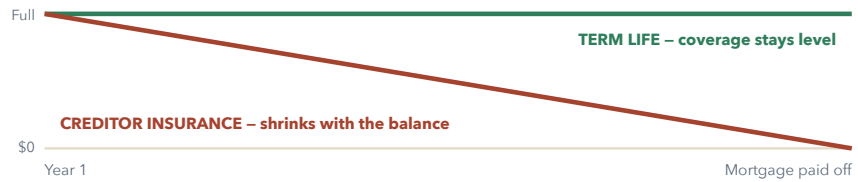
Life insurance — mostly if someone depends on your income. For most families, plain **term life** insurance is the answer: cheap, simple, covers a set number of years while the kids are young and the mortgage is big.

You'll also be offered **mortgage life insurance** (creditor insurance) when you sign your mortgage. Understand the difference before you tick the box:

	TERM LIFE	MORTGAGE CREDITOR INSURANCE
Who gets paid	Whoever you name	The lender
Coverage amount	Level – stays the same	Shrinks as your mortgage shrinks
Premium	Level for the term	Often stays flat while coverage falls
Medical check	Up front, before you're covered	Often reviewed *after* you claim
If you switch lenders	Follows you	Usually ends

That "reviewed after you claim" line is the one that hurts families. For most healthy people, term life is better value and more reliable. But don't cancel anything until the replacement is actually in force, and if you have health conditions, creditor coverage is sometimes the option you can actually get.

TWO WAYS TO COVER THE SAME MORTGAGE



The premium often stays flat while creditor coverage falls. Payouts go to the lender, not your family.

Level cover that pays your family, versus shrinking cover that pays the lender.

Disability insurance is the one people skip and shouldn't. You're far more likely to be unable to work for a stretch than to die young. Check what your employer provides — most group plans have real gaps.

Home and tenant insurance. Homeowners: you need it and your lender requires it. Renters: tenant insurance is cheap, covers your stuff *and* your liability, and many landlords require it. Get it.

Shop it every year or two. Home and auto premiums drift upward on loyal customers. A twenty-minute call to a broker at renewal often finds hundreds of dollars. Bundling and raising your deductible are the two easiest levers.

Skip: most extended warranties, most credit card balance insurance, and any policy sold to you with urgency.

CHAPTER 9

Renting smart (while you save)

Renting isn't throwing money away. It's buying flexibility, and in this market it's often the smart season of a plan. Make it work harder:

- **Know the lease.** Ontario has a standard lease form for most private rentals. Your landlord generally can't demand more than first and last month's rent as a deposit, plus a refundable key deposit. Requests for extra months up front, or for post-dated cheques as a condition, aren't standard.
- **Know the increase rules.** Most units first lived in before November 15, 2018 have rent increases capped by the province's yearly guideline. Increases need 90 days' written notice, at most once a year. Newer buildings are exempt from the cap — worth knowing before you sign, because it changes how predictable your rent is.
- **Know that you have somewhere to go.** The Landlord and Tenant Board handles disputes, and Ontario has rules about

repairs, entry notice, and eviction. You don't have to just absorb a bad situation.

- **Get tenant insurance.** Cheap, and it covers more than you think.
- **Bank the gap.** If owning would cost more than your rent all-in (it usually does), automatically save the difference. That's your down payment quietly assembling itself — ideally inside an FHSA.

CHAPTER 10

Homeowner money habits (GTA edition)

Already own? A few local specifics that save real dollars:

- **Don't auto-renew your mortgage.** When your term ends, the first offer your lender mails is rarely their best. Start shopping about 120 days out. Since late 2024 you can even switch lenders at renewal without redoing the stress test, as long as you're not borrowing more or stretching your amortization. This single habit is worth more than a year of skipped lattes.
- **Use your prepayment privileges.** Most mortgages let you make a lump-sum payment each year and increase your regular payment. Early extra payments hit principal hard, because that's when interest is heaviest.
- **File the city paperwork.** Toronto makes homeowners file a short occupancy declaration every year for the Vacant Home Tax. Miss it, and the city can assess a tax of 3% of your home's *assessed* value — even if you live there. You can dispute it, but save yourself the headache. Other cities have similar taxes; know your local rules.
- **Shop insurance yearly.** See Chapter 8.

- **Mind the property tax cycle.** Set bills up on pre-authorized payment so a missed installment never bites. If you think your assessment is wrong, there's a process to challenge it.
- **Keep a home file.** Receipts for improvements, permits, warranties. It helps at sale time, with insurance claims, and if you ever rent out part of the house, at tax time too.

CHAPTER 11

Retirement, in plain words

Retirement income in Canada comes from three or four places: **CPP**, **OAS**, whatever you saved (RRSP, TFSA, pension), and sometimes **GIS** if income is low.

Two decisions matter more than any investment pick:

When to start CPP. You can start as early as 60 or as late as 70. Starting early permanently reduces your monthly amount by 0.6% for each month before 65, up to 36% less at age 60. Waiting increases it by 0.7% for each month after 65, up to 42% more at 70. Those are permanent, inflation-adjusted differences. If you're healthy, have other income to live on, and expect a long life, waiting is often worth far more than people assume.

When to start OAS. Normally at 65, and it can also be deferred to 70 for a permanent increase of 0.6% per month — up to 36% more.

One trap to know: OAS gets clawed back once your net income passes a threshold (around $93,500, adjusted annually), at 15 cents on every dollar above. If you're anywhere near that line in retirement, the order you draw from your accounts starts to matter a lot. TFSA withdrawals don't count as income; RRSP and RRIF withdrawals do.

That's a conversation with an accountant, and it's worth having a few years before you retire, not after.

The simple version if retirement feels far away: contribute automatically, take the employer match, keep fees low, and don't panic-sell in bad years. That's most of the game.

CHAPTER 12

New to Canada? Start here

The first year sets up the next ten. In rough order:

1. **Open a chequing and savings account** and get direct deposit going. Many banks have newcomer packages with waived fees — ask, and compare, including credit unions.
2. **Build credit deliberately.** A secured credit card, one small recurring bill on it, paid in full monthly. Your credit history from another country generally doesn't transfer, so you're starting fresh. A year of this changes what's possible.
3. **File a tax return every year, even with little or no income.** It's how you get the GST/HST credit, the Canada Child Benefit, and Ontario benefits — real money, and it also builds the paper trail lenders want.
4. **Keep proof of rent paid.** Twelve months of on-time rent, documented, can substitute for a thin credit file with some mortgage lenders.
5. **Open the registered accounts** as soon as you're eligible. TFSA room builds from when you become a resident and are 18 or older. The FHSA is available if you're a first-time buyer.

6. **Know that mortgages are possible sooner than you think.** Permanent residents, and some people on work permits, can often buy with as little as 5% down through newcomer programs. If you're not yet a citizen or permanent resident, check the federal ban on home purchases by non-Canadians before anything else — it runs to January 1, 2027 and covers the whole GTA, with some exemptions. It's a question of status, not down payment.
7. **Be careful who advises you.** Newcomer communities get targeted by affinity fraud — someone from your own community, church, or country selling an "opportunity." Verify licences. Always.

CHAPTER 13

Scams and traps (Toronto's greatest hits)

Where money concentrates, scammers gather. The current classics:

- **Title fraud.** Criminals impersonate homeowners to sell or re-mortgage a house — paid-off homes owned by older folks are the top target. The boring fix: **title insurance**, a one-time few hundred dollars for an existing-owner policy. Tell your parents.
- **"Guaranteed returns."** No legitimate investment guarantees high returns. Anyone pairing "guaranteed" with double digits is describing either a fantasy or a crime.
- **CRA impersonators.** The real CRA doesn't demand gift cards, crypto, or arrest you by voicemail. Hang up, log into CRA My Account directly, check for yourself.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE – NOT AN ACTUAL CLIENT

A voicemail told Anita's father his SIN was "suspended" and police were on their way unless he paid today. He was rattled enough to grab his car keys. But the family has a rule: any scary money call gets a call to Anita first. Together they logged into his CRA account. No debt. No letters. Nothing. The terrifying voicemail was a script, read to thousands of people that same day. The two-minute check beat the ten-thousand-dollar mistake, and now his grandkids know the rule too.

- **Wire fraud on closing day.** Someone hacks or spoofs an email thread and sends fake wire instructions for your down payment. It's devastating and often unrecoverable. **Always phone your lawyer's office at a number you looked up yourself** to confirm banking details before sending money.
- **Rental deposit scams.** A listing that's too good, an owner who's "overseas," a request to send a deposit before viewing. Never send money for a place you or someone you trust hasn't stood inside.
- **Mortgage application "help."** Anyone who suggests fudging your income or faking a document is recruiting you into mortgage fraud. Same goes for "just put the house in your name for a friend." Straw buyers aren't clever middlemen. They're the ones left holding full legal responsibility when it all unravels. Real approvals don't need fiction.
- **Pressure, in any costume.** Every scam shares one ingredient: urgency. "Today only." "Don't tell anyone." "Sign now." Honest deals survive a two-day think. Make "let me sleep on it" your reflex.

Verify anyone in the mortgage business at FSRA's public registry, and anyone selling investments through the Canadian Securities Administrators' registration check. Two minutes each. Free.

CHAPTER 14

Raising kids who aren't weird about money

Short chapter, big payoff. Kids learn money by watching, not by lectures.

- **Let them handle real money early.** An allowance they control, including the freedom to blow it on something dumb and feel it.
- **Say the quiet parts out loud.** "We're not buying that today because it's not in the budget this month" teaches more than any app.
- **Show them the RESP.** A teenager who knows there's $30,000 waiting for college behaves differently about school.
- **Give them a first bank account and, at 18, a small credit card with a tiny limit** — used for one bill and paid off monthly. Starting a credit file at 18 instead of 25 is a genuine head start.
- **Be honest about mistakes.** "We carried credit card debt for two years and here's what it cost us" is the most valuable financial lesson most parents can give.

CHAPTER 15

The habits, assembled

The whole book in one checklist:

1. Track spending once; automate the flow after payday.
2. Emergency fund: $1,000, then 3–6 months of must-pays.

3. Bills on time, cards under 30%, check your reports yearly.
4. Grab the employer match. Open the FHSA if a home's in your future. Fill the TFSA. Then more RRSP.
5. Kids? Fund the RESP for the 20% grant. It's the best deal you'll get.
6. Kill 20% debt before chasing 7% returns.
7. Invest cheaply, broadly, automatically. Don't time it.
8. Buy term life and disability if people depend on you. Skip the junk.
9. Run the car math honestly.
10. Renters: bank the rent-vs-own gap automatically.
11. Owners: shop every renewal, use prepayment privileges, file the city declarations.
12. Sleep on everything. Verify everyone. Phone to confirm wires.
13. Ask for help before, not after. Cheap questions beat expensive lessons.

None of this is glamorous. All of it works. Toronto rewards the patient: the city's expensive, but it's also full of opportunity, and you now have a better plan than most.

CHAPTER 16

Money questions, answered plainly

Should I pay off debt or save first?

Get a $1,000 starter cushion, then attack high-interest debt hard, then build the full emergency fund. Always take an employer match first, no matter what. It's a guaranteed return nothing else matches.

TFSA or RRSP?

Rough rule: if you're in a lower tax bracket now than you expect in retirement, favour the TFSA. Higher now than later, favour the RRSP. When in doubt and your income is modest, TFSA. It's flexible and never taxed.

What if I over-contributed to my TFSA?

Take the excess out right away and expect a 1% per month penalty on the excess while it sat there. Check your room in CRA My Account, and remember withdrawals only free up room the following January.

Is a high-interest savings account enough for retirement?

No. Cash loses to inflation over decades. Savings accounts are for emergencies and short-term goals; long-term money needs to be invested.

How much should I have saved by my age?

Honestly, comparison charts cause more harm than help in a city this expensive. Better questions: is anything automated, is high-interest debt shrinking, and is the number bigger than last year?

Are index funds actually safe?

They rise and fall with markets. That's real, and there will be scary years. What they avoid is the risk of betting on a single company. For long-term money, broad and cheap has been hard to beat.

Should I buy a home or keep investing?

Both work. Homes force savings and give stability; investing is more flexible and often cheaper month to month. The real answer depends on how long you'll stay put. Under five years, renting and investing usually wins.

Do I need a financial advisor?

If your situation is simple, maybe not. If you have kids, a business, property, or a retirement in sight, one good session helps. Ask how they're paid, and whether they must act in your best interest.

My credit card debt feels impossible. What now?

Call a non-profit credit counselling agency, not a "debt settlement" company that charges fees. They'll build a plan for free and can often negotiate reduced interest.

Should I lend money to family?

Only what you can afford to never see again. If it's significant, write it down. Loans that live only in memory end friendships and family dinners.

How do I check if someone's licensed?

Mortgage professionals: FSRA's public registry. Investment sellers: the Canadian Securities Administrators registration check. Insurance agents: FSRA as well. All free, all public.

What's the single highest-return thing I can do this month?

Take an employer match if you're leaving one on the table. If not, open the RESP for the 20% grant if you have kids. If neither applies, automate one transfer the day after payday.

Word list

Amortization — how long until a loan is fully paid off. **CESG** — the 20% government grant that goes into an RESP. **Compound growth** — earning returns on your past returns. **Deductible** — what you pay out of pocket before insurance kicks in. **Diversification** — spreading money across many investments to lower risk. **FHSA** — First Home Savings Account. **GIS** — Guaranteed Income Supplement, for lower-income seniors. **MER** — the yearly fee a fund charges, as a percentage. **Prepayment privilege** — the extra payments your mortgage allows without penalty. **RESP** — Registered Education Savings Plan. **Term life insurance** — level coverage for a set number of years. **TFSA** — Tax-Free Savings Account.

Your one-page plan

Fill this in today. It's the whole book in six lines.

1. My automatic transfer happens on: _____ (date after payday), for $_____
2. My emergency fund target is $_____ . Today it holds $_____
3. My highest-rate debt is _____ at _____%. It'll be gone by _____
4. Accounts I need to open: □ FHSA □ TFSA □ RRSP □ RESP
5. My insurance gap to fix: _____
6. The one call I've been putting off: _____

Go get it.

Where these numbers come from

Every load-bearing number in this book, and where to check it yourself. Checked August 2026; limits index yearly, so the links beat the printed page.

TFSA ($7,000 for 2026; $109,000 cumulative; penalties and re-contribution rules) — **CRA — TFSA**; your personal room is in **CRA My Account**

RRSP, FHSA, and Home Buyers' Plan rules — CRA: **FHSA** · **Home Buyers' Plan**

RESP grants (20%, $500/year, $7,200 lifetime) and the Canada Learning Bond — **canada.ca — education savings**

CPP and OAS timing (start early for less, defer for more) and the OAS clawback (~$93,500) — **canada.ca — public pensions**

Credit scores and free reports — **equifax.ca** · **transunion.ca**

Rent rules (guideline increases, deposits, the Landlord and Tenant Board) — **tribunalsontario.ca — LTB** and **ontario.ca — renting**

Toronto Vacant Home Tax (annual declaration, 3%) — **toronto.ca — Vacant Home Tax**

Mortgage renewal and prepayment rights — FCAC: **renewing your mortgage**

Budgeting and mortgage qualifying tools (free, official) — FCAC: **Budget Planner** · **Mortgage Qualifier**

Registration checks — investments: **aretheyregistered.ca** · mortgage licences: **fsrao.ca** · investor education: **getsmarteraboutmoney.ca**

Every benefit you might be missing — **Benefits Finder**

The fine print (the honest kind)

This guide is for learning. It is not financial, legal, tax, or investment advice, and it is not an offer to lend. Everyone's situation is different, so talk to a licensed professional before making big money decisions. All the people and numbers in the examples are illustrative examples, not actual clients. Contribution limits, grant rules, benefit thresholds, tax rules, and city programs were checked in August 2026; they change, so confirm current rules before you act. Sources for every number are listed in “Where these numbers come from.”

YYZ Mortgage is operated by Sunjong Kim, Mortgage Agent Level 2 (FSRA Lic. #M17002120), on behalf of Dominion Lending Centres National Ltd., FSRA Brokerage Lic. #12360, an independently owned and operated franchise of Dominion Lending Centres.

Questions? **hello@yyz.mortgage** · 905-597-5463 ext. 200 · **yyz.mortgage**

WHEN YOU'RE READY

What now?

Books are great. Answers about *your* situation are better — and the first conversation is free, friendly, and pressure-free. Three ways in:

Email us	**hello@yyz.mortgage** Tell us what you're working on. We reply like humans.
Call us	**905-597-5463 ext. 200** Old-fashioned, still works.
Start online	**yyz.mortgage** Calculators, guides, and a 60-second estimate.

The free guide library

01 **Keys, Please!**
Buying your first home in the GTA, step by step.
yyz.mortgage/guides/first-home

02 **The Big Switch**
Selling and buying at once – penalties, porting, bridges, renewals.
yyz.mortgage/guides/moving-up

03 **Your House, Your Backup Plan**
The honest HELOC handbook: the tool, the trap, the payback plans.
yyz.mortgage/guides/heloc

04 **The Family Money Talk**
Reverse mortgages, care costs, POAs – for adult kids and their parents.
yyz.mortgage/guides/family