

Start Them Early

Teaching Your Kids to Invest, One Stock They Love at a Time

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Before You Start



This is a short book about the best financial gift you can give a child, and it is not money. It is time, plus a lesson most adults never got: what it feels like to own something that grows.

It will take you about fifteen minutes to read. The method inside it is the one I used with my own kids. It costs about fifty dollars a month to start, it works with the government's new Trump Accounts or with a plain account you open yourself, and the real curriculum is not the account at all. It is the conversations you will have across the kitchen table while the account does its quiet work.

One honest note. I am not a financial advisor, and this is education, not personal advice. The Trump Account rules described here are the rules as they stand in 2026; new programs get adjusted, so check the current details before you act. The teaching method does not depend on any program. It worked before Trump Accounts existed, and it will work long after the rules change.

Chapter 1: The Fifty-Dollar Month



When my kids were about five years old, I started investing for them. Not a fortune. About fifty dollars a month, the price of a pizza night, taken out automatically before life could spend it on something else.

I cannot tell you exactly how many years I kept it up. Fifty dollars a month was only the start: as the kids grew, I raised the amount, and birthday and Christmas money sometimes went in too. Not always. Sometimes they wanted the thing more than the stock, and that was fine. But I can tell you where it landed: today those accounts are worth about $40,000. Money that started as fifty quiet dollars a month became a grown-up head start, not because I am a genius and not because we got lucky, but because the money was given the one thing young money has and old money does not: time.

Here is the part nobody expects. The account balance was not the biggest thing my kids got out of it. The biggest thing was what they learned while it grew, and that is the real subject of this book. Any parent can start the account. The parents who

change their kids' lives are the ones who make the kid part of it.

Chapter 2: Time Is the Real Gift



Compounding is a dull word for a small miracle: your money earns money, and then the money it earned earns money too. Given a few years, it is a snowball the size of a marble. Given the years between kindergarten and graduation, it starts to look like real wealth. Given the years between a child's birth and their retirement, it is almost absurd.

Run the plainest possible example. Fifty dollars a month, invested in the broad stock market, earning an average of 8 percent a year, which is roughly what the US market has done across long stretches. Start at age five:

If you…	You put in	It could be worth
$50 a month from age 5 to 18	$7,800	about $13,600
$50 a month from age 5 to 25	$12,000	about $29,500
The age-18 balance, then left completely alone to age 65	that same $7,800	about $508,000

Read that last line again. The parent contributed $7,800, in fifty-dollar pieces, before the child could ride a bike without training wheels. If the child simply never touches it, time does the rest. These are illustrations, not promises; markets do not pay 8 percent like rent, and some decades are worse. But the shape of the math never changes. The most valuable ingredient in a child's account is the one only a parent can give early: years.

This is also why the newest tool in the toolbox matters. Even the government's seed money, $1,000, invested at birth and never added to, could be worth about $4,000 by age 18 at that same 8 percent, and roughly $149,000 by age 65 if it is left alone. Free money plus sixty-five years is a powerful combination. Which brings us to the two roads.

Chapter 3: Road One: The Trump Account



In 2025, Congress created a new kind of account for children, nicknamed the Trump Account. It is structured as a retirement account for a minor, and it was designed to do exactly what this book is about: give every child a head start and let time work.

The basics, as they stand in 2026:

Any child under 18 with a Social Security number can have one. There is no earned income requirement, which is what makes it different from the IRA your teenager would otherwise need a job to fund.

Children who are US citizens born between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2028 get a one-time $1,000 deposit from the federal government to seed the account. It is not automatic paperwork-free money; a parent claims it with an election (IRS Form 4547). If your child is in that window, claim it. It is free, and Chapter 2 shows what free money plus time can do.

Family and others can add up to $5,000 per child per year, combined. Employers can contribute up to $2,500 of that, which some companies now offer as a benefit. Contributions opened in July 2026.

The money must be invested in low-cost US stock index funds, the kind that track the S&P 500. No individual stocks, which matters for Chapter 5, as you will see.

The account is locked until the year the child turns 18. After that it follows the normal retirement account rules. It is a genuine long game, and that is a feature: nobody can raid it for a car at sixteen.

For a newborn in the seed window, this is close to a free lunch, and you should take it. For older kids, there is no seed, but the account can still be opened and funded. Either way, it is road one. Road two is the one I drove.

Chapter 4: Road Two: Do It Yourself



Everything the Trump Account does, a parent can do by hand, and parents did it for decades before the program existed. I did. You open a custodial brokerage account for your child at a firm like Schwab or Fidelity, you are the custodian who manages it, and the money legally belongs to the child. At 18 or 21, depending on your state, it becomes fully theirs.

The DIY road trades the Trump Account's structure for freedom:

You choose the investments, including individual stocks. That freedom is the entire teaching method of the next chapter, and the Trump Account does not allow it.

There is no $5,000 cap and no seed money. Your contributions are simply your money, invested in their name.

You can start at any age, with any child, today, including the teenagers the seed window missed.

Plenty of families will use both roads: claim the Trump Account seed if the child qualifies, because free money is free money, and run the teaching account yourselves, because the lessons are the point. The accounts are tools. The education is the inheritance.

Chapter 5: Buy What They Know



Here is the method, and it is the heart of this book. When my kids were small, we did not buy index funds. We bought the companies in their day.

We bought Disney, because they watched Disney. We bought Coca-Cola, because they drank Coca-Cola. We bought McDonald's, because every kid on earth knows the golden arches. Were those the stocks a portfolio manager would choose? Not necessarily, and that was never the point. The point was that a six-year-old cannot feel anything about an index fund, but she can absolutely feel something about owning a piece of the company that made her favorite movie.

So we would sit down together and buy a little. And then the world changed shape for them. Driving past a McDonald's: that is partly ours. A Coke at a cookout: we own a piece of that. They walked around as owners, and they thought like owners, and they asked questions no textbook could have gotten out of them. Why did the stock go down? Is Disney making a new movie? That curiosity is the education. The stock was just the bait.

Think of the names in your own child's day. The shoes on their feet (Nike). The tablet in their hands (Apple). The show they stream (Netflix). The candy at Halloween (Hershey). The toys on their floor. Any company they can point at is a company they can understand owning, and understanding is the whole game at that age.

Two ground rules kept it sane. First, the amounts stayed small and the bulk of our saving still went into sensible, diversified investments; the single stocks were the classroom, not the retirement plan. Second, we reviewed together a few times a year, at the table, statement open. Some picks went up and some went down, and the down ones taught the most: prices wiggle, ownership is long, and panic is not a strategy. Try teaching that with a lecture. The Disney shares taught it for free.

Chapter 6: From Stocks They Love to Funds That Last



Childhood stocks have an expiration date, and it is called growing up. As my kids got older and the novelty of owning the arches gave way to real life, we sold the individual stocks and moved the accounts into broad exchange-traded funds, the simple diversified kind: the whole US market in a fund or two, bought automatically, ignored most of the time.

This is the graduation, and it is worth saying out loud with your teenager when you do it: we bought those companies so you could learn what ownership feels like. Now we own a little of everything, because that is how adults invest for goals that matter. Same account, same habit, grown-up portfolio. If your family uses a Trump Account, notice that it starts at this destination: index funds only. The DIY road just takes the scenic route through the classroom first.

What carries across the graduation is not the tickers. It is the reflexes. Money goes in automatically. Statements get opened and read. Down years are weather, not

emergencies. And starting early is normal, because they watched it be normal their whole childhood. You are not really handing them an account at eighteen. You are handing them twenty years of having seen how this works.

Chapter 7: The Habits That Matter More Than the Money



If you remember nothing else, remember these.

Start before it feels worth it. Fifty dollars a month looks pointless in year one and obvious in year fifteen. Every parent who did this wishes they had started at birth. Every parent can start this month.

Make it automatic. Willpower is a terrible system. The transfer happens on payday, like a bill, except this bill pays your child.

Involve the child. Pick the first stock together. Open the statements together. Let them watch it grow and let them watch it dip. An account they have a hand in becomes a story they tell themselves about who they are: an owner, an investor, someone whose money works.

Keep your hands off it. The account's worst enemy is a parent treating it as a family emergency fund. It is the child's head start. Emergencies are what your own

emergency fund is for.

Let time finish the job. The deepest lesson is patience, and it cannot be rushed, which is exactly why it has to be started early. You are planting a tree whose shade your child will sit in as an adult, and possibly whose fruit their own kids will see. Plant it this week.

You Own Part of That Company

The teaching does not end when they turn eighteen. Lucas is turning nineteen, and the other day we were driving past one of those big self-storage places along the highway. I said, "By the way, you own part of that company." He looked at me. "I do?" He does. It sits in the account we started when he was small, and he had forgotten it was even in there.

That is the normal state of things. A portfolio on a screen is abstract, and a teenager has a hundred louder claims on his attention. So every time we drive by a company he owns a piece of, I say it out loud. The storage place. The warehouse store. The phone company. Not a lecture, just a sentence: you own part of that.

It does something a statement never does. It turns the town he drives through into a list of businesses that are partly his, and it reminds him the account is not a number that goes up and down. It is ownership. Even at nineteen, especially at nineteen, they still need to hear it. Saying it, over and over, is how a child who was started early becomes an adult who thinks like an owner.

The Start-Them-Early Page



Pick a road. Trump Account if your child qualifies for the $1,000 seed (US citizen, born 2025 to 2028; claim it with the election). A custodial brokerage account for any child, any age, today. Both is fine.

Start the transfer: about $50 a month, automatic, on payday. Raise it when you can.

Teach with names they know: Disney, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nike, Apple. Small amounts, bought together, reviewed together. Ownership first, portfolio theory later.

Graduate to index funds as they grow: sell the childhood singles, buy the broad market, keep the automatic habit.

Never stop, never raid it, and let time, the one ingredient only you can give them this early, do the heavy lifting.