



An Extended Guide · No. 2010

Kids' Debit Cards & Allowance Apps: What to Know

How they work, what they cost,
and how relatives can help

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! Read this first — the parent runs it; relatives can chip in

A kids' debit or allowance app is set up and controlled by the parent, who holds the reins on spending, chores, and alerts. Grandparents and other relatives usually can't run the account, but they can often contribute money to it as a gift. So if you're a grandparent, your role is to add to it, not manage it — and that's exactly as it should be.

Kids' debit cards and allowance apps, explained

These apps give a child a debit card and an app while keeping a parent firmly in control. This guide explains how they work, what they cost, the parental controls, and how relatives can pitch in — for parents and grandparents alike.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. These tools can be a wonderful way to teach kids about money, with real guardrails. Let's walk through them so you can choose and use one with confidence.

We'll cover the main apps, the two ways they charge, the controls that matter, how the money is protected, and how a grandparent can gift — all in plain English, with honest notes where prices change.

★ Choosing one for your family?

If you're weighing these apps or want help setting one up, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'll help you pick what fits and get it going safely.

The whole guide, on one page

The essentials, if you remember nothing else.

- ❑ These apps give a kid a debit card with a parent in full control.
- ❑ Two fee models: a monthly subscription (covers the family), or free if linked to a bank/wallet you already have.
- ❑ Parents get spend limits, chore/allowance automation, alerts, and an instant freeze.
- ❑ Relatives usually can't manage the account, but can often gift money to it.
- ❑ Money sits at an FDIC-insured partner bank; any investing feature is NOT insured.
- ❑ Exact prices and features change — check the app's current terms before you commit.

✓ The golden idea

Think 'training wheels for money': the child spends and learns, the parent sets the limits and watches, and the whole thing is designed to be safe while they get the hang of it.

What these apps actually are

A simple picture before the details.

A kids' debit/allowance app pairs a debit card for the child with an app the parent controls. The parent loads money, sets rules about where and how much the child can spend, assigns chores or an allowance, and sees every transaction. The child gets a real card to learn with — but inside a fence the parent builds.

They're not quite bank accounts in the child's name; instead the money usually sits at a partner bank, and the app is the friendly controls on top. The point is teaching: kids learn to spend, save, and sometimes earn and invest, with a grown-up gently steering.

✓ Controls are the whole point

The magic of these apps isn't the card — it's the controls. A parent can cap spending, block categories, and freeze the card instantly, so a kid can learn by doing without real risk.

The main apps, in brief

A quick tour of the common choices as of now — features and prices shift, so verify before you pick.

- **Greenlight** — a popular subscription app with broad controls and tiers that add saving and investing features.
- **Acorns Early** (formerly GoHenry in the U.S.) — a subscription allowance-and-chores app for kids.
- **Step** and **BusyKid** — other kid/teen options, with their own mixes of chores, cards, and low or no monthly cost.
- **Chase First Banking** — free, but for existing Chase checking customers; controls for kids and teens.
- **Apple Cash Family** and **Cash App for teens** — free, parent-supervised options tied to those wallets.

✓ Start with what you already have

If you already bank with Chase or live in an Apple family, a free built-in option may do everything you need — no new subscription required. Check those before paying for a separate app.

How they charge: the two models

Understanding the two pricing styles makes choosing easy.

Subscription apps

Apps like Greenlight, Acorns Early, and BusyKid charge a flat monthly (or yearly) family fee that usually covers several children and unlocks the chores, savings, and sometimes investing features. Higher tiers add more. The fee is for the teaching tools and controls, not for the money itself.

Free, built-in options

Chase First Banking, Apple Cash Family, and Cash App's teen accounts have no subscription — but they ride on a product you already have (a Chase account, an Apple family, a Cash App account). Fewer bells and whistles, but free and often plenty.

! Prices change — check before you commit

The exact monthly fees move around and apps add or drop tiers. I won't quote specific prices here because they'd go stale; check the app's current pricing page before you sign up so you know exactly what you'll pay.

The parental controls that matter

This is where these apps earn their keep.

- **Spending limits** — cap how much a child can spend, per purchase, per day, or per week.
- **Category or store blocks** — some apps let you block certain kinds of merchants.
- **Chores and allowance** — automate a weekly allowance, or tie money to completed chores.
- **Real-time alerts** — get a notification for every purchase, so you always know what's happening.
- **Instant freeze** — lock the card from your phone the moment it's lost or misused.

✓ Alerts plus a freeze are the essentials

If you set up nothing else, turn on purchase alerts and know how to freeze the card. Together they let you watch over spending and shut down any problem in one tap.

How grandparents and relatives can pitch in

A lovely feature — giving straight into a child's account.

Many of these apps let relatives contribute money to a child's account, sometimes through a special 'gift' link the parent shares. A grandparent can send birthday money, match a savings goal, or add to an allowance — without being able to control the account, which stays the parent's job.

If the app has a gift link, the parent just shares it with you; otherwise, you send money to the parent to add. Either way, it's a warm way to help a grandchild learn to save, and the parent keeps the oversight. We cover sending to grandkids broadly in its own guide.

✓ Ask the parent for the gift link

If you'd like to contribute, ask the child's parent whether their app has a gift link. It drops your gift straight into the grandchild's account — often right into a savings goal.

Where the money lives — and what's insured

A fair question for any money app: is it safe?

With most of these apps, the child's money sits at a partner bank that's FDIC-insured, with the insurance passing through to protect the funds (commonly up to the standard limit). So the cash balance is protected much like money in a regular bank. Chase First Banking is an actual Chase bank account.

The important exception: any investing feature — stocks, or in some apps a little cryptocurrency — is NOT FDIC-insured and can go down in value. That's normal for investing, but worth knowing, so a child's (or your gift's) invested dollars aren't confused with insured savings.

! Cash is insured; investments aren't

The spending and savings balance is typically protected by FDIC insurance through a partner bank. Any stocks or crypto feature is an investment — not insured, and it can lose value. Keep that distinction clear.

Using them to actually teach money

The real value isn't the card — it's the lessons.

These apps shine as teaching tools: a child sees their balance, learns that money runs out, earns through chores, and watches savings grow toward a goal. Features like 'round up to savings' or parent-matched goals turn everyday spending into gentle lessons about earning, saving, and waiting.

A parent (or grandparent) can use the shared view to talk through choices — 'you spent it all on day one, how'd that feel?' — in a low-stakes way. That ongoing conversation is where the lasting value is.

✓ Pair the app with conversation

The app provides the data; you provide the wisdom. A few gentle chats about the choices a child makes with their card teach more than any feature does.

Two ways people come to this — and both are fine

Parents and grandparents come to these apps from different angles — one runs the account, the other wants to help. Both roles matter.

If you're the parent setting it up

You hold the controls and choose the app.

- Check whether a free built-in option (Chase, Apple, Cash App) covers your needs first.
- Set spending limits, alerts, and know how to freeze the card.
- Share a gift link with relatives who want to contribute.

If you're a grandparent helping

You can't run it, but you can give — and that's a real gift.

- Ask the parent for a gift link, or send money to the parent to add.
- Consider matching a savings goal to encourage good habits.
- Leave the controls to the parent; your part is the generosity.

★ I'll help whichever role you're in

Parent choosing an app, or grandparent wanting to contribute — I'll help you set up your part. Call (330) 200-8042.

Choosing the right app for your family

A few questions point you to the best fit.

- Do you already bank with Chase, or live in an Apple family? A free built-in option may be all you need.
- Do you want chores and allowance automation? A subscription app like Greenlight or Acorns Early specializes in that.
- How many kids? Subscription apps usually cover several children under one fee.
- Do you want investing or saving lessons built in? Some tiers add those.
- What's your budget for a monthly fee — or do you want free?

★ Let's match it to your family

There's no single best app — just the one that fits your bank, your kids, and your goals. I'm glad to help you compare and choose. Call (330) 200-8042.

Setting it up safely

A few steps keep the account secure from the start.

- ❑ Download the app from the official app store, not a link.
- ❑ Use a strong, unique password and turn on two-step verification.
- ❑ Set spending limits and turn on purchase alerts right away.
- ❑ Teach the child to keep their card and PIN private and to tell you if it's lost.
- ❑ Know how to freeze the card instantly from your phone.

✓ Set limits before handing over the card

Configure the spending limits and alerts before your child ever uses the card. Starting with the guardrails in place is far easier than tightening them after a surprise.

Keeping kids safe from the scams

Young users are targets too — a little coaching protects them.

Kids and teens face the same money-app scams adults do, sometimes aimed squarely at them: fake 'giveaways' that ask them to send money first, 'I'll pay you double' tricks, and strangers who 'accidentally' send money and ask for it back. Teach them the simple rule: never send money to someone you don't know, and never share a card number, PIN, or code.

Because you get alerts and can freeze the card, you'll spot trouble fast and can step in. Use any slip as a gentle teaching moment rather than a scolding — it's exactly the safe, low-stakes place to learn these lessons.

! Teach: never pay to get a prize

The scams that target kids almost all involve sending money first to 'claim' something. Drill the rule early: a real prize never asks you to pay, and you never send money to someone you don't know.

Common mistakes

Avoid these and these apps stay a pleasure.

- **Paying for a subscription app** when a free built-in option would do.
- **Not setting limits or alerts** before handing over the card.
- **Confusing insured cash with uninsured investing** inside the app.
- **Not checking current prices** and getting surprised by a fee change.
- **Skipping the money conversations** that give the app its real value.

! The avoidable cost

Many families pay for a subscription app when their existing bank or Apple family already offers a free kids' option. Check what you have before you pay for something extra.

As the child grows up

These apps are a stepping stone, not a forever account.

As a child becomes a teen and then an adult, they'll need more independence and eventually a real bank account of their own. Many of these apps add teen features (like a credit-building angle) along the way, and some transition toward a standard account at adulthood. Plan to graduate your child to a regular bank account when the time comes.

When they head to college or start a job, help them open their own checking account and perhaps a first credit card to build credit responsibly. The kids' app did its job: it taught the basics in a safe place.

✓ Have a graduation plan

Think of the kids' app as money training wheels. Plan for when your child moves to a real bank account — around college or a first job — so the transition is smooth and intentional.

A word on privacy

These apps hold data about your child, so a little care is wise.

A kids' money app knows your child's spending, and the app holds personal and financial details for the family. Stick to reputable, well-known apps, use strong security, and review the app's privacy settings and what it shares. For apps with social or investing features, check whether anything is public and lock it down.

If you ever close an account, remove saved cards and personal info where you can. The same tidy habits you'd use for any money app apply here, with the added care that it concerns a child.

✓ Reputable apps, strong security

Choose a well-known app, use a strong password and two-step verification, and glance at its privacy settings. A child's financial data deserves the same care as your own — or more.

For grandparents who want to help

If you're the grandparent, here's your simple, happy role.

You don't manage the account — that's the parent's job — but you can be a wonderful source of gifts and encouragement. Ask the parent whether their app has a gift link; if so, you can drop birthday money or a savings match straight into your grandchild's account. If not, send to the parent to add.

Matching what a grandchild saves, or contributing toward a goal they're working for, is a gift that teaches as it gives. It's one of the loveliest ways to be part of their growing up from a distance.

★ I'll help you set up your giving

If you're a grandparent wanting to contribute to a grandchild's app, I'll help you get set up on your end, safely. Call (330) 200-8042.

A simple plan to get started

Put it together and it's straightforward.

- ❑ Check whether a free built-in option covers your needs first.
- ❑ If not, compare one or two subscription apps on features and current price.
- ❑ Set up with strong security, spending limits, and purchase alerts.
- ❑ Teach your child the 'never pay to get a prize' and 'keep your PIN private' rules.
- ❑ Share a gift link with relatives who'd like to contribute.
- ❑ Plan to graduate to a real account as your child grows.

★ I'll help you set the plan up

A short visit gets the right app chosen, set up safely, and the kids coached on the basics. Call (330) 200-8042.

Your kids'-app checklist

The whole guide, boiled down.

- ☐ I checked free built-in options before paying for a subscription.
- ☐ I verified the current price and features (they change).
- ☐ I set spending limits and turned on purchase alerts.
- ☐ I know how to freeze the card instantly.
- ☐ I understand cash is FDIC-insured but investing isn't.
- ☐ Relatives have a gift link (or send to me to add).

★ Want help choosing or setting up?

If you'd like a hand comparing apps or getting one going safely, call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The kids'-app questions I hear most, answered plainly.

Q: Do these apps cost money?

It depends. Subscription apps (Greenlight, Acorns Early, BusyKid) charge a flat monthly or yearly family fee; free options (Chase First Banking, Apple Cash Family, Cash App for teens) ride on a product you already have. Prices change, so check the app's current terms.

Q: Can grandparents add money?

Often yes — many apps have a gift link the parent shares, so relatives can contribute directly. If not, you send money to the parent to add. Either way, the parent keeps control of the account.

Q: Is my child's money safe?

The cash balance usually sits at an FDIC-insured partner bank, so it's protected much like regular bank money. Any investing feature (stocks or crypto) is NOT insured and can lose value.

Q: What controls does a parent get?

Typically spending limits, category blocks, chore/allowance automation, real-time purchase alerts, and an instant card freeze — all from the parent's phone.

Q: Which app is best?

There's no single best — it depends on whether you already bank with Chase or use Apple, how many kids you have, and whether you want chores and investing features. Compare current prices and pick the fit.

★ Still have a question?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you compare the options and set up the right one for your family.

The quick recap

Kids' money apps in one glance.

- ❑ A kid's debit card with the parent in full control.
- ❑ Two fee models: subscription, or free if built into what you have.
- ❑ Controls: limits, chores, alerts, instant freeze.
- ❑ Relatives usually can't manage it but can gift to it.
- ❑ Cash is FDIC-insured; investing features are not.
- ❑ Verify current prices and features before committing.
- ❑ Pair the app with money conversations — that's the real value.

✓ Training wheels that work

Choose the fit for your family, set the guardrails, and talk through the choices — and these apps become a genuinely good way to raise money-smart kids.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made choosing and setting up a kids' debit or allowance app feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a bank, a lawyer, or a financial advisor — for disputes, taxes, or legal questions I'll help you reach the right people and prepare what you need.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Two Ways They Charge

Subscription vs. free built-in

	Subscription	Free built-in
Examples	Greenlight, Acorns	Chase, Apple, Cash
Cost	Monthly family fee	No subscription
Rides on	Its own app	A product you have
Features	More tools/tiers	Fewer, often plenty

Check a free built-in option first before paying for a subscription.

The Controls a Parent Gets

Where these apps earn their keep

	Control	What it does
Spend limits	Cap per purchase	or per week
Chores/allowance	Automate earning	and payouts
Alerts	Ping on every	purchase
Instant freeze	Lock the card	in one tap

At minimum, turn on alerts and know how to freeze the card.

What's Protected

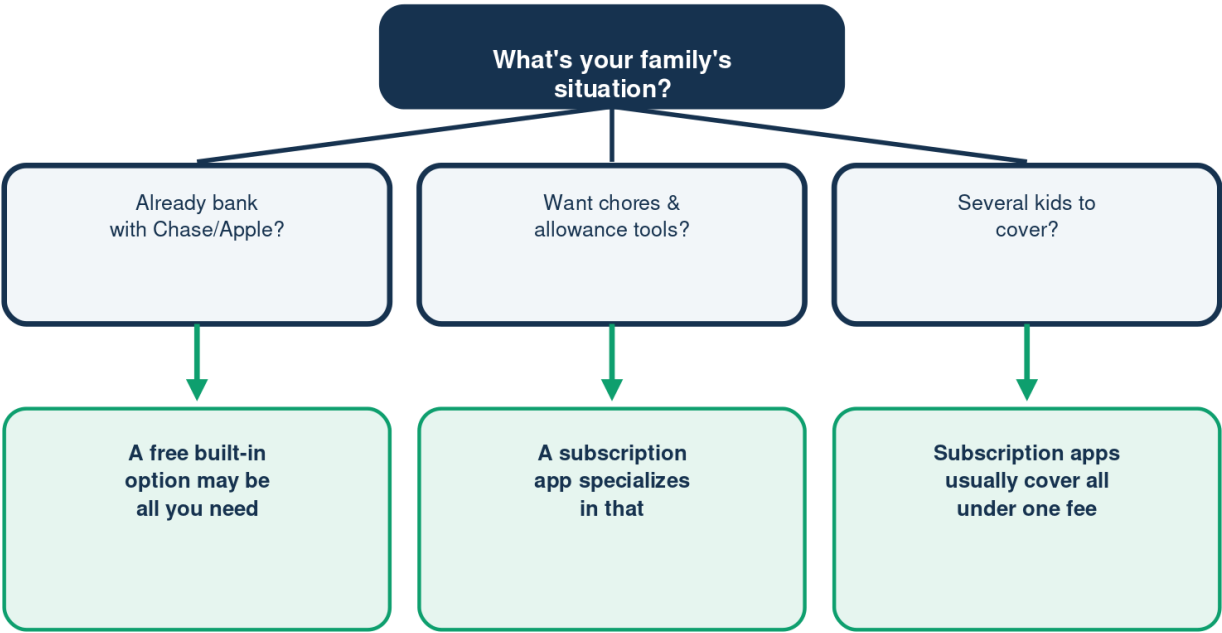
Insured cash vs. uninsured investing

	Cash balance	Investing
Held at	FDIC partner bank	Markets
Insured?	Yes (pass-through)	No
Can lose value?	No	Yes
Think of it as	Savings	An investment

The spending/savings balance is insured; stocks or crypto are not.

Which App Fits Us?

A few questions point the way



There's no single best app -- compare current prices and features.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

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