



Ask an Expert FAQ



ABLE ACCOUNTS

HOW TO SAVE WITHOUT RISKING
YOUR CHILD'S BENEFITS

www.experiential-life.com



ABOUT THE FAQ

If you registered for this conversation, you already know something most parents figure out too late - that navigating the systems for disabled and neurodivergent children isn't something you can do alone.

And you know how crucial it is to get the right information at the right time.

If we haven't met yet, I'm Christy.

I'm a parent of an autistic teen, a former nonprofit founder, and a 15-year healthcare and disability advocate.

I built Experiential Life Community because I kept watching families get lost in systems that weren't designed with us in mind.

Every month inside ELC, we sit down with the experts who actually work inside the systems your family is navigating.

This FAQ captures the questions families asked during our conversation with Kelly Nelson about saving for our kids' future.

You registered because this mattered to you. That matters to me.

Christy xoxo



I recently heard someone say that the system forces disabled people to live in poverty - and I can't stop thinking about it. That is what made this conversation so important - and so necessary.

The questions below came directly from parents who showed up to our Ask An Expert conversation with Kelly Nelson about ABLE accounts.

Some were submitted in advance. Some typed them in the chat. Some jumped on camera after the recording stopped to ask their question live.

The full replay lives inside of Experiential Life.

THE BASICS

“What even is an ABLE account?”

An ABLE account is a savings account specifically for people with disabilities - and it was designed to protect their SSI and Medicaid benefits. It's one of the few financial tools built to work for families like ours.

“My child receives SSI. Does that mean they automatically qualify?”

Yes. If your child receives SSI or SSDI benefits, they automatically qualify. If they don't receive those benefits yet, you can still open an account. You self-attest to a qualifying disability, and you'll want your child's physician to sign a Disability Certification Form. Keep it in your files - you don't need it to open the account, but you'll want it if you ever need to show it.

“Who actually owns the account? My child is only four.”

Your child owns the account. Only a person with a disability can be the owner. If your child is under 18, you open and manage it on their behalf. That role is called an Authorized Legal Representative

(ALR), which for most families is a parent or guardian. Once your child turns 18, they can manage it on their own, or keep someone they trust in that role.

THE QUESTION ALMOST EVERY FAMILY ASKED

“We don’t have extra money to save. Is this even realistic for us?”

This was the most common question submitted ahead of the conversation and the answer is yes. You can open an ABLE account with as little as \$25.

You don’t have to use the ABLE account only as a savings account. You can deposit money you will spend - on medical equipment, therapy, daily care costs - and pay those same bills from it. The money is protected while it sits there, and you use it for what you were going to pay for anyway.

And if you have people asking how they can help? Some ABLE account programs come with a personal gifting page. Share the link at birthdays, holidays, or graduations - family and friends contribute directly, and they may even get a state tax deduction for doing it.

THE NUMBERS

“How much can go into the account each year?”

The 2026 annual contribution limit is **\$20,000** from all sources combined - you, family, friends, employers, anyone.

If your child is working and not contributing to a retirement account, they may be eligible to contribute an additional \$15,650 on top of that through the ABLE to Work program.

“How much can the account hold - and what happens to my child's benefits if it grows?”

The ABLE account can hold up to **\$100,000** - and that money does not count against the SSI asset limit.

If the balance goes above \$100,000, benefits are **suspended** - not terminated.

Suspended means the monthly SSI payment pauses, but Medicaid, waivers, and all other benefits stay in place.

The moment the balance drops back below \$100,000, the benefit reactivates automatically.

“Someone in the chat asked about SSI back payments - what happens when that lump sum comes in?”

This comes up constantly. When a family has been waiting for SSI approval, Social Security back pays from the date the application was submitted.

It is not unusual to receive \$4,000, \$8,000, or more in a single payment - and immediately, through no fault of their own, the family is over the \$2,000 asset limit.

Putting that back payment directly into the ABLE account protects it. It's no longer a countable asset, and your child can use it when they need it, instead of being forced to spend it down just to keep their benefits.

SPENDING THE MONEY

“What can ABLE funds be used for?”

Anything that supports your child's health, independence, or quality of life.

Someone asked during the call whether a vacation counts. The answer is yes, because rest and time away benefits everyone

physically and emotionally. The definition is intentionally broad. The two things that **don't** qualify: gambling and buying gifts for other people (paying for other family members to go on vacation would be considered a gift).

“Does the ABLÉ prepaid card count against the \$2,000 asset limit?”

No. Money on the ABLÉ prepaid card is still considered part of the ABLÉ account - so it doesn't count against the limit. It also tracks your spending automatically, which is helpful if you ever need to show your records.

“Are there taxes when money comes out of the account?”

No - as long as the money is spent on a qualified expense.

THE QUESTION ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE GONE

“We plan to leave our home to our child when we pass. Does that affect the ABLÉ account?”

This came directly from a parent in the room, and it's one of the most important questions. An ABLÉ account has an annual contribution limit of \$20,000 - which means you cannot leave a home, a life insurance policy, or most estates directly to one.

This is where a **Special Needs Trust** becomes part of the conversation. A Special Needs Trust has no contribution limit and can hold a home, a large inheritance, or a settlement. It's managed by a trustee - the person with the disability doesn't have direct access, which is different from an ABLÉ account where they can.

There are three types of Special Needs Trusts, and which one is right for your family depends on your specific situation. That conversation goes deeper than this FAQ can..

What you just read is the foundation.

The questions in this FAQ came directly from parents who showed up - some to just listen, some totally overwhelmed, some just relieved to finally be in a room where someone knew the answer.

What this FAQ couldn't capture is what happened in the live conversation.

The follow-up questions. The moment Kelly stopped to make sure everyone understood the difference between “suspended” and “disenrolled” - because it's the kind of thing that looks simple until it isn't.

The questions families asked after the recording stopped.

That full conversation lives inside Experiential Life.

And it's one of many you get access to the moment you join.

Where to find more information:

[Maryland ABLE Plain Language Guide](#)

[ABLE Today](#)

[Achieving a Better Life Act of 2014](#)

THIS IS WHAT EXPERIENTIAL LIFE WAS BUILT FOR

Here's the problem.

The systems your family is navigating were not designed with us in mind.

They're complex and overwhelming. They seem to be connected and simultaneously siloed.

And most families are left to figure it out by crowdsourcing answers from people who are just as lost as they are - or worse, from falling down the research rabbit hole for hours.

That's what Experiential Life Community exists to fix.

It's not just the resources, replays, and scripts I curated for families like ours...

It's my 15 years of healthcare and disability advocacy - my connections and knowledge that I spent years refining.

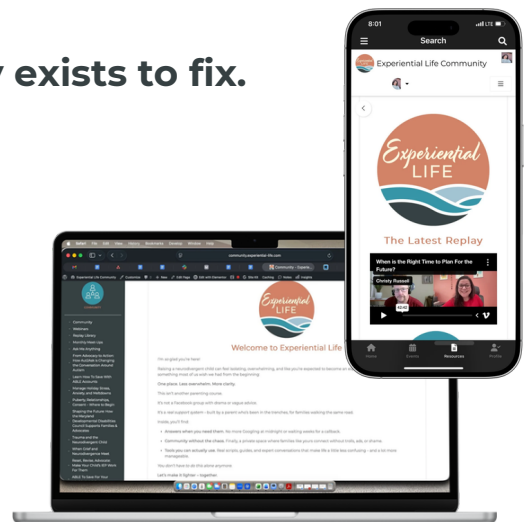
That's why we get the experts in the room with you - to answer your questions directly.

And - you get a community of parents like you - only it's protected from internet searches, ads, and that pesky algorithm.

You stop wondering if you're missing something important.

You stop carrying the mental load of figuring this out alone.

You start making decisions with clarity - because you finally have the information and the people to back you up.



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30 days free to start.



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