The 529 Savings Checklist by Age

A simple, stage-by-stage guide to keeping your college savings on track — from your child's first year through college enrollment.

Age 0–2

GET STARTED

- [ ] Open a 529 account (even with a small starting deposit)
- [ ] Check whether your state offers a tax deduction for in-state plan contributions
- [ ] Set up automatic monthly contributions, even if small ($25–$50/mo compounds meaningfully by 18)
- [ ] Invite grandparents/family to contribute for birthdays and holidays via gift links
- [ ] Choose an age-based investment portfolio (more growth-focused this early)

Age 3–5

BUILD THE HABIT

- [ ] Increase monthly contribution if income allows (aim to grow it annually)
- [ ] Run a projection to check if you're on pace for your target school type
- [ ] Revisit your state's contribution limits and confirm you're maximizing any tax deduction
- [ ] If saving for multiple kids, open or fund a second account for younger siblings

Age 6–10

STAY ON TRACK

- [ ] Recalculate your projection — costs and your income may have changed
- [ ] Review investment allocation; still growth-focused but confirm it matches your risk tolerance
- [ ] Check for excess funds in other accounts (custodial, savings) that could be redirected to the 529
- [ ] Compare your combined balance across children if you have more than one account

Age 11–14

RAMP UP

- [ ] Begin shifting toward a more conservative, age-based investment mix
- [ ] Re-run your projection with updated college cost estimates for your target schools
- [ ] If behind pace, calculate the additional monthly contribution needed to close the gap
- [ ] Start researching financial aid basics (FAFSA opens October of senior year, but familiarity helps now)

Age 15–17

FINAL STRETCH

☐	Shift to a mostly conservative allocation to protect the balance from market swings
☐	Confirm your list of likely schools and re-check projected costs against your balance
☐	Understand qualified withdrawal rules before your child enrolls
☐	Plan the timing of withdrawals to align with tuition due dates and avoid unnecessary taxable events

Age 18+	USE THE FUNDS
☐	Confirm each withdrawal matches a qualified expense (tuition, fees, room & board, books, required supplies)
☐	Keep receipts and account statements for your records
☐	If funds remain after graduation, consider a sibling beneficiary change or a Roth IRA rollover under current rules
☐	Revisit non-qualified withdrawal tax/penalty rules if any funds won't be used for education

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Want a personalized projection instead of general benchmarks? Run your own numbers, including support for multiple children, at 529collegesavingsplancalculator.com

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