

How to Save Money on School Supplies

Saving-savvy bloggers share their frugal shopping tips for back-to-school season.

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Oh, the promise of the back-to-school shopping season: Entirely new wardrobes! Stacks of pristine notebooks! Unblemished backpacks! Adorable organizing devices! And, if you completely buy in to the promise, a big ole credit card bill.

We asked several mom bloggers who specialize in saving money, living simply, and not buying in to the parenting frenzy du jour how they rein in spending during the late summer shopping extravaganza. May their ideas help reduce your expenditures *and* your anxiety levels.

SUPPLIES

Wait for marching orders. Most teachers send out a list of supplies your offspring will be expected to have that year. Shopping before you get that list just ups your odds that you'll spend money on things your kids don't need and won't use. "If you shop before having must-have lists, you may end up buying the coolest, cutest pencil case ever, only to find out that your child's teacher doesn't require that item," says Denise Schipani, mom of two grade-school-aged boys and author of *Mean Moms Rule* (<http://deniseschipani.com/>). Part of this tip is to also assiduously avoid any items that aren't on the list - no matter how cool or cheap.

First, shop at home. Instead of taking your supply list straight to a retail outlet, see how much you can gather from your craft drawers, closet shelves, and file cabinets, suggests Amy Suardi, blogger at *Frugal Mama* (<http://www.frugal-mama.com/>). "Using what you have teaches kids good values and keeps clutter down (</-p1017-qxid%7C04251148.html>) at home." It also gives you a good excuse to capitalize on buying notebooks, pencils, glue sticks, etc., in bulk when it's on sale.

Buy built to last for the items that take a beating. There are some things you shouldn't skimp on-book bags, with their daily dose of lugging ever heavier loads and being tossed across the room, and sneakers, which literally get pounded day after day, are at the top of that list. Which is why Schipani gets her boys' book bags from a major manufacturer with a lifetime guarantee. "I get my bags at LL Bean. I've never had to actually use the warranty policy, because the bags last so long my boys' homework needs outgrow them before they have a chance to break." For sneakers, she capitalizes on her mother's wish to contribute to the back-to-school effort buy asking her to take the boys shoe shopping, a family tradition that's been passed down through generations. (» [Learn how much is too much homework \(-p1017-qxid%7C1108170555.html\)](/-p1017-qxid%7C1108170555.html))

Set the stage for re-use. Here's a savvy tip from mom-of-five Meagan Francis, founder of *The Happiest Mom* (<http://thehappiestmom.com/>). Stick with just the last name when labeling kids' things-you'll make hand-me-downs less confusing and (hopefully) a little easier to sell. "My youngest son is using the same backpack his three older brothers used. He doesn't mind that he didn't get a new one: in fact, he likes knowing he is using the same pack his cool older brothers did."

Use sales to stock up. One of the good things about back-to-school season (</-p1017-qxid%7C1107061639.html>) is that many stores will put supplies on mega-sale. *And* they'll arrange all school-related items in one or two aisles, meaning you also save time. "I stock up when Staples has its

penny sales so I'll often have extra notebooks and other school supplies on hand," says Leah Ingram, blogger at Suddenly Frugal (<http://www.suddenlyfrugal.com/>). That way, when your child needs a new notebook in February, you'll have one that cost one penny when they're currently selling for \$4.

CLOTHES

Hold off on buying cold-weather clothes. Let's face it, August and even early September are still pretty hot in most parts of the country - why spend good money on corduroys in August that will only be too tight and/or too short by the time cooler weather arrives? Instead, wait until the mercury drops a bit, Schipani suggests. "That month of still-warm weather buys you time to sort through the fall clothes and see what can be handed down or given to charity, and what is still useful. Once they get to actually wearing the cooler weather stuff, you can see what they are wearing most often, and what they will need more of."

In the meantime, volunteer. Sara Tetreault, mom of two teenage boys and blogger at GoGingham.com (<http://gogingham.com/>) takes donating used clothes to charity one step further. After going with their mom to drop off their used things at a local non-profit that provides clothes to under-privileged kids, the boys volunteer at the center for an afternoon. "It helps remind them how much they have to be thankful for, and takes the focus off all the things we *aren't* buying."

Try second-hand first. Hit the consignment and thrift stores *before* you visit the regular retail outlets to save beaucoup dollars - a boys' long-sleeved shirt that'll run you \$8-\$12 new will only set you back \$2-4 used. Or, organize a swap for clothing and supplies with other parents. "You'll not only save money, you'll reduce waste," Tetreault says. Once you see your haul from the second-hand circuit, you'll have a lot less to buy at full-price.

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