

# BACK TO SCHOOL SAVING



## Table of Contents

What You Already Have on Hand.....	3
Making the “Master List” .....	7
What To Do With Outgrown Clothes .....	11
More Simple Strategies to Increase Your Back to School Savings .....	14
Where to Shop.....	17
Time Your Shopping.....	19
Summary.....	21

In these challenging economic times, back-to-school time can be an expensive experience. We all want to do everything we can to ensure our kids have all they need to have a successful school year. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take to see to it that your child is ready.

In this report, we detail several simple strategies that will help you stretch your back-to-school funds. You really can spend less this year while preparing your children for their best school year ever!

## What You Already Have on Hand

Most of us at some point have bought an item we thought we needed, only to come home and discover that we already had one! This is particularly true with back-to-school shopping.

Before the pressures from peers and advertisements encourages your kids to ask you relentlessly for new gear, it's important to know what school supplies and clothing your children already have.

Sometime early in your child's summer vacation, plan a few days to "explore" together their desk, clothing drawers, and closet. The age of your child will determine how much help they can be in this process.

This "cleaning out" task helps in many ways: you'll get rid of garbage that's collected in your children's rooms, find nearly new items to save for the coming school year, and create space for new school supplies and clothes.

- **Your Child's Desk: Home of Hidden School Supplies**

Although your ultimate purpose is to take inventory, you're also looking to find space for the new school supplies you'll soon be buying.

Follow this handy list of basic steps for this process:

1. Go through your child's desk drawer by drawer. Be sure to check every drawer. You may even want to dump them out on the floor and go through the piles of stuff there, rather than rummage through the drawers themselves.
  - As you've probably learned long ago, kids can be remarkably good at "hiding" items from parents, and even from themselves.
2. Have your child help you sort out nearly new items, partially used items, and old desk supplies that can be thrown away. If your child seems resistant, try making a treasure hunt out of it. Create a list of school supplies you're "hunting" for and check them off as they find each one.
3. Place all the nearly new supplies in a box. A large, clear Tupperware or Rubbermaid tub is a great way to see what you've got inside of it. Of course, any box will work – even a used cereal box if you're really tight on money.
4. Label the box clearly, and put it somewhere out of reach until the next school year. Once you've gone to the work of gathering all of these supplies, there's no sense letting them go back "into circulation." You'd just have to find them all over again!

- Your Child's Clothing Drawers

Next, it's time to clean out the closet, dresser, and other clothing storage. Start with the drawers to make room for more folded clothes.

1. Divide and conquer. One by one, remove the drawers and sort the clothes. For this, it helps to have three boxes or bags. Label them "To Keep," "To Give Away," and "Garbage."
2. The rag bag. Items that are torn, stained, faded, or worn go into the rag bag or the garbage.
3. Does it fit? Have your child try on clothing items that are still in good shape. Do they fit? Are they good enough to use to start out the upcoming school year?
  - If the garments fit and you believe they're appropriate for your child to wear to school, place those items neatly into an emptied drawer.
4. Separate play clothes. Clothing that can still be worn but that you don't see as school-worthy can be stored in a separate drawer. These garments can be for wearing around the house or when your child goes out to play.
5. What to give away. If you come across clothes in pretty good shape but that don't fit, fold them neatly and place them into the "To Give Away" box.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- Donate those items to a favorite charity, hand them down to other parents, or better yet, keep them for a Swap Meet. Whether you make money from reselling them or just see them off to other homes, you'll be glad to have helped someone with your cast-offs.

Once you've cleaned out the drawers, move to the closet. You'll have made lots of space for folded clothes, including play clothes, some of which will probably be "retired" from the closet.

- **Your Child's Closet**

The closet will probably be the most challenging space to get through with your child. Explain that it's smart to see what clothing your child has so you'll know what to buy for the new school year. You might want to begin going through the closet in the morning after breakfast, so the both of you are well-rested.

1. Because kids' closets often have cluttered floors, try starting there. Have a garbage bag, a box, and some extra hangers ready. As you pick up items on the floor, determine if they need to be thrown out or laundered.
  2. If your child hasn't worn an item for some time, let them try it on so you'll know whether it will work for the coming school year. For clothes that are outgrown or suitable only for play, put them in the appropriate bag or box.
- 
1. Next, go through clothing items on hangers in the closet. This isn't as difficult as it sounds. For many of the items, you'll be able to tell at a glance whether to toss them, save them for school, or keep them for playtime.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Going through school clothes doesn't have to be a daunting task. Your child will certainly have opinions about what should be kept for future use. And not everything needs to be tried on. Some things will obviously not fit, and some will be too worn-out for school.

Also, if you have a very young child or feel like it might be too much to tackle all at once, you can break this into even smaller steps. One way to make this easier would be to make a pile of all of the clothes you aren't sure still fit, and have your child try them on later, instead of while you're working on the closet.

Taking an inventory of everything your child has relevant to school can save you big money. Thoroughly investigate your child's room to see what's actually needed for the upcoming school year. Doing so will increase your back to school savings.

*"I believe that thrift is essential to well-ordered living."*

*- John D. Rockefeller*

## Making the "Master List"

Whenever you shop for anything, go with a list in hand. The process of making the list encourages you to think through what's truly needed. In general, writing it won't take long.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Simply record the essentials your child will need, including school supplies and clothing. Consider what specific types of clothing your child needs.

Keep in mind that there's no need to shop for a whole year's worth of clothes at once! Your child may outgrow them anyway. Focus on fall, and go from there.

### ▪ School Supplies

You'll likely need some specific school supplies for the upcoming academic year. Here are some items you might include on this list:

- Pens
- Lined paper
- Crayons
- Ruler
- Protractor
- Spiral notebooks
- 3-ring binders
- Backpack
- Art supplies
- Calculator

Once you've got your list, you're ready to dig into the details. Many schools also publish lists of particular supplies your child needs for that year's assignments, so include those necessities on your list as well.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

These additional suggestions may save you money also:

1. Think about what type of backpack your child needs. Depending on your child's age and stature, you might want to consider a rolling backpack to help them avoid shoulder and back injuries.
2. Know the exact type of supplies needed, as many teachers are quite specific about their requirements. For example, if your child is in middle school or high school, you may need to purchase a scientific or graphing calculator.
3. Be familiar with the stores in your area. If your child has enough leftover school supplies to last for the first 2 weeks or so of school, consider waiting until after that time to buy anything new if the retailers in your area tend to offer deep discounts on leftover inventory after school starts.
  - However, some retailers offer the deepest discounts before school starts to entice you to their store during a time when you might be doing a lot of shopping, so pay close attention to the specials of competing stores.
  - Clothing

Reflect on what types of clothing and how many of each kind of garment your child needs for school. Review the following sections to determine which of these clothing suggestions will work for your child.

1. If you have a daughter. For girls, consider this list of clothes to start the school year off right:

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- 2 new pairs of comfortable pants
- 3 pairs of jeans
- 1 skirt or dress
- 3 blouses or shirts
- 5 pairs of socks
- A light jacket or long sweater
- A winter coat with hat and gloves

1. If you have a son. For boys, the list includes:

- 3 new pairs of pants
- 3 good shirts
- 5 pairs of socks
- A light windbreaker
- A winter coat with hat and gloves

As with school supplies, if your child has enough clothes to begin the new school year, wait a few weeks to buy new clothes. Kids' clothing goes on sale at that time and you can get a lot more for your money.

Writing down what your child needs to start the school year is important. To be comprehensive, include both supplies and specific clothing items on your list. With list in hand, you can do your shopping with a clearer idea of what your child needs to be prepared.

“Industry, thrift, and self-control are not sought because they create wealth,  
but because they create character.”

- Calvin Coolidge

## What To Do With Outgrown Clothes

When it comes to getting rid of clothing your child can no longer wear, you have several options. Attempt to sell the items at a garage sale or swap them for clothing that does fit your child. Or consider dropping off your child's gently used items at your local consignment shop to make a few dollars toward your back-to-school purchases.

- Garage Sale

In the event you have the time and the energy, consider having a garage sale. You'll be amazed at how much extra cash you can earn when you re-sell children's used and in-good-condition clothing.

While you're getting ready for the garage sale, do a walkthrough of each room of your home, especially the closets. You might find other things to sell such as furniture items and house wares that you no longer want or need. And more items to sell mean more money to add to your back-to-school budget.

- Swap Meet

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

You've likely heard about swap meets. People gather at a particular spot, bringing items they no longer want or need. Then, they trade their items with one another to get what they want.

Bartering is a great way to obtain nice used clothing for your kids and to trade your kids' clothes that no longer fit. If there are no pre-established swap meets in the area, hold a Child's Clothing Swap Meet.

Here's how:

- Send emails to several parents of kids of all ages. Try looking in your neighborhood or contact parents from your child's school.
- Set a date in advance for the Swap Meet to take place and give everyone at least a few weeks' advance notice. Schedule your Swap Meet during the summer, a month or so before school starts.
- Send weekly reminders with suggestions for parents to clean out their kids' closets. To prepare for the event, they'll want to throw out items that are stained or worn or ripped, and launder gently used items to barter at the Swap Meet.
- Establish a specific number of items for each parent to bring, such as seven items. That number also indicates the number of clothing items that parent can take home.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- In the meantime, keep clothes for the Swap Meet that, although small for your child, are in good shape and nice enough for another child to wear to school.
  - To prepare for the Swap Meet at your home, set up places to hang clothing in your garage. Alternately, clothing can be folded on tables and organized by gender and type of clothes.
  - When parents arrive with children's' clothing to swap, they simply hang up or lay out their items and begin selecting items they believe their kids can wear. Each parent can bring home the same number of items as they arrived with.
- Consignment Shops

Consider taking your child's too-small clothing to a consignment store. These days, many cities and towns have consignment shops devoted specifically to children. Prices tend to be reasonable if you're purchasing there, and you can make a few dollars per item selling gently worn clothes.

No matter what you decide to do with your child's clothes that are now too small, getting rid of them will help make room in their drawers and closet for new back to school clothes.

Having a garage sale, attending or holding a swap meet and dropping the clothes off at consignment shops are all strategies that will ultimately beef up your back to school savings.

“A penny saved is a penny earned.”

- English proverb

## More Simple Strategies to Increase Your Back to School Savings

Setting up and sticking to a budget will definitely increase your savings. For more details on that and on other simple back-to-school strategies, check out the rest of this chapter.

### 1. Set and Adhere to Your Budget

It's smart to draw up a budget for your child's school year needs. Without a budget, you may over-spend.

The amount you budget will largely depend on what you can afford and what your child needs to prepare for the new school year. Recent research indicates parents spend, on average, slightly over \$600 per child to get them ready for school.

- Depending on your child's age, the amount you spend on back-to-school shopping may fluctuate.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- As you may be painfully aware, older children – tweens and teens – can put a lot of pressure on parents. They often want to have the trendiest, most expensive supplies and clothing available
- If you have pre-teens or teenagers, it's important to establish rules with them about how much will be spent on their school needs. Share the figures from the budget with them and stick to it.
- If your child is adamant about having a particular style of jeans or shirt, present the idea that he or she is free to pay the difference between what you'll pay for the item and the more expensive version they want.
- Many times, when kids see the vast cost difference in these items, they don't want to spend their own hard-earned money on just one clothing item.
- Another option for obtaining the expensive or designer items is to shop online for used items at bargain basement pricing.
- Alternately, try visiting your local consignment shops.

Wherever and whenever you decide to shop for back-to-school supplies and clothing, stick to your budget when making purchases. When you set a budget that's honestly within your means, and adhere closely to it, you'll enter the school year free of guilt over how much you spent.

### 2. Shop During Tax-Free Holidays

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Do you live in or near a state with a sales-tax-free holiday? You can experience more savings on your back-to-school shopping if you take advantage of these days offered by several states.

The savings tend to be offered by the state over one or two weeks' time. During that period, you'll be charged no sales tax on school supplies for your child, which will save you money, sometimes close to 10%!

Also, many stores offer sales at the same time to encourage you to visit their store to do your shopping.

### 3. Use Social Networking to Pump up Back to School Savings

Are you Twitter-and-Facebook-literate? If so, you can receive alerts and special offers from these social networking sites. If not, get familiar with them so you can take advantage of their back-to-school savings.

- On Twitter, “follow” various retailers who’ll announce sales and even send out coupons to all their Twitter followers.
- On Facebook, simply “friend” the Facebook account of the retailers where you plan to shop. You’ll be invited to the store to take part in sales. You might even receive special coupons to use to purchase items at a discount.

If you’re feeling unsure about where to start, talk to other parents in your area who are computer-savvy. They’ll certainly have some tips and may even be willing to sit down with you and get you started.

“A man who both spends and saves money is the happiest man,  
because he has both enjoyments.”

- Samuel Johnson

## Where to Shop

Be adventurous when it comes to school shopping for your child. You'll be pleasantly surprised at the back to school deals you can obtain when you open your mind to shopping at a variety of venues. Here are some suggestions:

- **Consignment Shops.** Especially if you prefer name brand clothing for your kids, consignment shops can offer some nice price breaks on barely worn clothing. However, be aware that some consignment shop pricing is so high that, for the same amount, you can buy new items at the Wal-Mart instead.
- **Thrift Shops.** For parents and teens looking for the best buys possible, check out your local thrift shops. Your dollars spent will go to the charity involved. Look each item over very carefully for stains, rips, or missing buttons before purchase. Since thrift shops are constantly getting in new items for sale, stop in every week or so to see the latest items.
- **Dollar and Discount Stores.** Visit your local dollar and discount stores. Such stores often have deals that can't be beat on school supplies, like paper, pens, spiral notebooks, 3-ring binders, and backpacks.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- **Outlet Malls.** If you live within an hour's drive of an outlet mall, seriously consider doing some of your school-shopping there. Particularly if you or your child prefers higher quality items, the outlet mall might be the best place for you to shop.
- **Sam's Club, Costco, and BJ's Club Bulk Buying.** In the event you have more than one child, it might be wise to consider bulk buying items you know your children will be using over the coming school year, like ink pens, pencils, lined paper, printer paper, and spiral notebooks.
- **Take special care when purchasing ink pens, paints, and ink markers in bulk as they might dry out before your kids can use them.**
- **Online Shopping.** Search the internet for online deals and coupons you can use at various online and offline suppliers. "Group buy" websites – like Groupon and Living Social – and Amazon are great for this.

Use price comparison websites to find the least expensive pricing on specific items you seek. Ensure you include shipping costs when evaluating the final price of your items.

- **Online Textbook Websites.** If you have a college student in the family, getting them ready for the school year can be extremely expensive. And the price of college textbooks has gone through the roof over the last few years. Consider online textbook websites for reduced pricing or even online textbook rentals in lieu of purchasing them.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

No matter how small the back-to-school budget, you can still ensure your child is well-prepared to start the school year. Explore the above shopping opportunities to stretch your back-to-school-shopping dollars.

“Beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship.”

- Benjamin Franklin

## Time Your Shopping

Another important aspect of back to school shopping is timing. If you want to save as much money as possible, shop when school supplies, clothing, and computers are priced at their lowest.

Consider the following suggestions.

### 4. The Best Time to Shop for School Supplies

About 6 weeks before your child is due to start the new school year, your local retailers will begin advertising plenty of sales for school supplies in the local newspaper. Take a close look at all the sales flyers, as some of the pricing will be a better deal than others.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Some retailers will have unbelievably low prices – for example, spiral notebooks for twenty-five or fifty cents each. So keep your eyes open to grab some great back to school savings.

### 5. The Best Time to Shop for Clothes

Like school supplies, children's clothing tends to go on sale about 6 weeks before school starts. Although waiting until the beginning of school might save you more money, it might also mean less choice of items available for purchase, so that's also an important consideration when planning your shopping.

Also, remember to shop the out-of-season sales at your retailers all year round for great buys on back to school items. Clothing stores often have severe markdowns on seasonal items as each season's end looms.

### 6. The Best Time to Shop for Computer and Technology

Unlike most clothing, technology tends to be at bargain prices during the height of summer. Stores often have 4<sup>th</sup> of July sales that feature deep discounts. If you don't make it to those events, try the month before school begins; technology retailers also frequently have sales then.

Follow these tips to save money on computers and other electronics:

1. Avoid overspending on technology for your child. Every kid doesn't need his own computer.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

- These days, technology moves so quickly that what you buy this year will be outdated in just a few years. Sometimes it's best to wait until college to get a big-ticket item like this.
  - If your family gets a new desktop every 2 or 3 years, you might not need to purchase a laptop for your child.
1. If your tween or teen really does need their own computer, consider the lower cost, smaller "netbooks."
    - Available at great savings during sales, netbooks might be the perfect computer for your child's school work. Sometimes you can find them for under \$250 on sale.

Before you begin your back-to-school shopping, think about the timing. If you shop for school supplies, clothing, and computers at opportune times, your back to school savings will multiply.

"I was brought up in an era when thrift was still considered a virtue."

- Paul Getty

## Summary

Make it a goal to retain as many of your school-shopping dollars as possible. Take inventory of your child's belongings, make a list of items needed, and get rid of barely worn clothing. Ultimately, this will save you money.

## BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGS

Applying simple strategies like making a shopping budget will also help. Knowing where and when to shop will put money in your pocket, too. Strive to put these methods into practice this year for your best back-to-school savings ever!

“An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

- Author unknown