

Special Report: Back to School Shopping

Guide on How to Save Money on Back to School Shopping



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Special Report: Back to School Shopping: How to Save Money

Introduction

Here we go again. Summer seems far too short and then it's time for the kids to return to school. Even in a recession, it seems that the prices of school needs have not gone down. In fact, they may have gotten more expensive, at least the name brands. That is all the more reason to do your best to save money wherever you can.

Since back to school shopping occurs every year, there are some things that stay the same. First, you know that you will need certain items: clothes, shoes, school supplies, textbooks (for college) and dorm items. With cuts in education, teacher's lists of wish items are also getting longer. Your kids will be asked to bring extras to school for use by the entire class, especially in elementary and middle school.

At least with these predictable purchases you can begin with a plan. Whoever thought that you'd need a plan to go school shopping? However, mapping out your strategy can save you time, gas and money, and not necessarily in that order. It will also require you to have a talk with your kids about ground rules when it comes to what you will and will not buy for them. That goes for younger children and especially teens.

So, without further ado, let's get right to ways to save money this year and every year forward. In this report you will learn:

- * Tips for your back to school shopping trips
- * How to save money on clothing for kids of all ages
- * How to save money on school supplies
- * How to shop for the needs of college kids

Use some or all of the tips in this report to save yourself money. For an experiment, tally up how much school shopping usually costs you. If you have more than one child, then it is doubled. If you haven't used discounts or other strategies in the past, don't worry about it. Just come up with a ballpark figure.

After you read and follow some or all of the tips in this report, tally up what you spent this year. There should be a change in the total cost. If it is about the same, then you were using savings strategies in the past as well without even realizing it. Even a 20 percent savings is something to sing about.

TIPS FOR SHOPPING TRIPS

Before you go out to shop, take a look at the following tips. They are more like guidelines to help keep you on track once you have done all of the legwork to create your stellar savings plan. In the rush and hubbub of back to school activity, it is easy to throw the baby out with the bathwater and pack it all in, but resist the urge. You'll be glad you did.

Shop Alone

Don't take the kids with you. If you want to go to the store and you don't have a sitter, wait until you do. In fact, schedule with a sitter so you can do the shopping trip alone. Kids have a way of enticing things out of you like that brand name pair of jeans or a cool notebook with Disney characters on it. They can wear you down, especially in crowded stores when you are tired.

Shop When Well Rested

Just like you shouldn't go to the grocery store when you are hungry, don't go school shopping when you are tired. You are less likely to stick to your list that way. In your frustration and haste, you may throw anything in the cart just to get out of the store. When you can think clearly, you will be more inclined to stick to your game plan.

Comparison Shop at Home

Before you jump in your car, hit the computer and the newspaper for deals. Each week, scan papers for what you need. If you find it at a great discount price, circle it and hit the shops. Don't neglect stores who give back to school deals online only. They may even offer free shipping for your business.

Create a Budget

When people shop for school items, they can spend several hundred dollars - and that is just on clothing. Decide how much each child will be entitled to spend on clothing. Come up with a ballpark figure for school supplies for all secondary school-age kids. Stick to it as much as possible.

A rule of thumb is to use current prices as your guide to come up with your budget. If prices drop, you save money.

Buy in Bulk

Wherever possible, buy in bulk. This will mostly apply to school supplies and undergarments. You can never have too much underwear or pencils. This is not considered overbuying because they will always be used. Extra can be used at school or donated to stores collecting for needy kids who can't buy school supplies.

Avoid Overbuying

This tip mostly applies to notebooks, binders, backpacks and specialized supplies. School lists change from year to year, so you can cut back on everything but the basics until school officially starts and you get the word on what to buy. Also, when you overbuy, some money is wasted if you don't utilize the supplies the next year.

Inventory What You Have

Another good point - use what you have so you can buy less this year. Go through the garage and your kids' closets. There might be unused binders, notebooks or even book covers lurking around. That is money that can be saved and used toward some other purchase.

Use Cash

Plastic is versatile but it can also lead to excess spending. When all you have to do is flash your credit card, you are more likely to buy that extra purchase you didn't plan on making. Using cash is a good indicator that you will stop buying when you are out of money.

Buy Quality Products

Cheaper is not always better. Look for quality in your purchases, especially clothing. In the interest of durability, buy a well-made shirt that will last for a couple of years instead of one that will rip after a few washings. There is more than one way to waste money.

Follow the Plan

Don't feel pressured to buy from one place. Part of shopping around for prices is to hit the stores that offer you a good deal. One store is not going to have it all. If there are significant savings in driving to another store, then the gas will be worth it.

SAVING MONEY ON SCHOOL CLOTHES

Shop Off Season

At the end of each season the current styles go on sale to make room for the next season's look. Buying summer clothing at the end of summer or the beginning of fall promises a better price than at the beginning of spring. Buy winter clothing during the beginning of spring. You can stock up on turtleneck sweaters, pants and even a coat or two for the coming winter. If you can estimate the growth patterns of your child, you can buy a size bigger in anticipation for next year's wardrobe.

Visit Discount Stores

Goodwill stores and thrift stores are great places to shop for vintage clothing. Many teenagers are into that these days. Instead of buying nouveau vintage at high prices from fashion stores, buy the real thing for a fraction of the cost at discount outlets. Many people donate clothing that they have never worn. Even if you get a \$200 blouse for \$20 from the thrift store, you have come out way ahead.

Consignment shops are another great place to shop. Here you can sell them your clothing that the kids can no longer wear to make extra money to shop for more clothing this season. Check with local consignment shops to see what types of clothing they accept for payment.

Give Kids a Limit

There is nothing wrong with setting limits. When the kids were younger they probably accepted what you bought them. Their input was appreciated but you still had the final decision. Now that they are a bit older, they can have a dollar amount tied to their wardrobe where they can make the decision to buy what they want within that limit.

For teens who have jobs, set a limit for them too. Standard clothing like underclothing, socks and uniforms if needed for gym class or sports will likely be your responsibility, but name brand items are on them since they are making an income. In fact, the chance to buy their clothing could be a motivation for getting a job in the first place.

EBay

You can find just about everything on eBay including back to school clothing. For higher-priced items, like sneakers and jeans, bid in auctions or shop in the marketplace. You may be able to get a sweeter deal on them here than in an athletic store. Look around for sellers with high reputations and good feedback.

Hand-Me-Down Clothing

No one particularly likes to wear second-hand clothing unless it is in good shape and in cool styles. That is where buying quality comes in. The clothing can be worn by another child the next year.

Another trick for hand-me-down clothing is using your sewing skills to give them new flash. Have your kids try their hands at being clothing designers. They can inspect hand-me-downs and put them together in new combinations to create their own style. Add extra material, sequins or other flash to jeans and blouses just in time for school.

SAVING MONEY ON SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Get a List

Teachers love to keep parents informed of what they need. You can check on the school's website to see if it is posted and also stores like Wal-Mart. Some carry supply lists for area schools. These are just general lists of supplies that any student in that grade would need regardless of the teacher.

You could also use last year's list. If your child is moving from first grade to second grade, not much is going to change except the teacher's wish list. When lists really become important ahead of time is when kids move from elementary school to middle school and then from middle school to high school.

Take Advantage of Sales

Someone is always guaranteed to have a sale on school supplies to gain a share of the back to school business. Check the local papers beginning in July to see if any early sales are going on. Stock up on pencils, loose leaf paper, pens, erasers, and notebooks.

Use tax-free holidays. Many states offer tax-free weekends. During this time you can shop for any qualified school supplies including clothing and technology without paying sales tax. The weekend is usually after the first week of school. Now, parents have lists of what students will need in hand so they can purchase computers, calculators, binders, flash drives and other specialty items.

Shop in online supply stores. We often forget about discounts here. Many wholesalers may sell school and classroom supplies in bulk for a deep discount. Places like Oriental Trading Company offer classroom needs in bulk. If your child's teacher has a big wish, you can stock up here. Check to see if these stores waive shipping fees. That may be comparable to shopping in a regular store.

Use coupons. They are a mom's best friend during back to school season. There are thousands of dollars that could be saved each year on all sorts of items if coupons were used consistently. Try combining your coupons with other sales going on to increase your discounts. Definitely use them during tax-free holidays.

For online stores, look up coupon codes for your potential purchases. Visit sites like www.currentcodes.com for a list of popular stores with websites that are offering deals on back to school supplies and clothing.

Visit Discount Stores

For school supplies you can't beat the prices at a dollar store. A box of pencils may cost 50 cents. You can stock up on packs of paper for younger kids who don't need much. But, even here you have to be careful. If you are buying a pack of 50 sheets of paper for a dollar you would get a better deal at Wal-Mart buying a pack of 250 sheets for \$1.50. Don't forget your comparison shopping skills.

The flea market is another place to shop for back to school deals. You can buy backpacks and other school bags here. For half of what they may cost in the store you can find the latest styles that kids like. And, because it's name brands that you trust, you can get quality for a great price.

Recycle Old Supplies

Do you still have notebooks hanging around? What about folders, binders and colored pencils? If they are still in good condition, use them again. One missing pencil doesn't ruin the whole pack.

See what you can reuse for another year of school. When you buy a durable backpack, it may last a younger child for three or four years while they are in elementary school. That alone has saved you about forty or fifty dollars per child.

SAVE ON COLLEGE NEEDS

Textbooks

College kids will need textbooks. And, they get more expensive each year. In lieu of buying them, here are some other options. Buy a used book from someone who was in that class the year before. Check your child's syllabus to be sure that the same edition is needed.

Borrow books or share them with fellow classmates. If your child lives in the same dorm and they have the same class, they can study together to save costs.

Buy at bookstores and online. Places like Border's and Barnes and Noble also sell textbooks that are on syllabus lists. See if you can get a discount off the manufacturer's price. Also, buy additional reading material from bookstores where you can buy paperback instead of hardcover and save money.

Furnishing the Dorm Room

There are more costs to college than just the tuition and room and board. Kids will need a furnished place to stay. The college provides the bed, dresser, desk and chair. It is up to parents to do the rest.

But, before you buy anything, get a look at the room first. If your child lives in a suite, there may be a refrigerator and/or microwave furnished for the students. That is one expense you can avoid.

Next, use what you can from their room at home before buying new stuff. At the end of the year they will just bring it all back home anyway, and then they'll have two of everything. Linens may need to be purchased because dorm beds are extra long and regular full-size sheets don't fit.

Bring other items from home. Include hangers for clothing, power strips, laptops, lamps and pillows. If your teen likes a comfortable room at home, they will probably already have all they need to furnish their dorm room.

CONCLUSION

So, have you discovered some ideas that were new to you? School shopping is a necessity but it doesn't have to break the bank. There are ways that you can get what the kids need and still manage to keep money in the bank.

No matter what grade your kids are in, ask them to help you. Give them the responsibility to buy their clothing using the budget allotted to them. This teaches them how to be creative when it comes to getting things done on a shoestring.

Try a few of these ideas the next time you go out to buy school items. Once you start you'll be looking for other ways to save. Tell your friends and your family. What's the point of learning something good if you can't share it with others?