

Back to School Savings Tips

Summer may be in full swing, but fall will be here before you know it. That means back to school shopping is on its way. Have you budgeted for school supplies and new clothes yet? Here are a few tips to keep your back to school shopping from squeezing the family budget.

Shop Smart. Sometimes quality trumps price. One example: backpacks. Spending a bit more upfront to purchase a good backpack will save you money in the long run, because the higher-quality item will last for years, whereas a cheaper one may need to be replaced in a matter of months. Clothes and shoes are on the other end of the spectrum, however. Children outgrow clothing so fast it doesn't make sense to spend extra money on brand names.

Start looking for sales and coupons early. Going back to school shopping last minute is a sure-fire way to spend more than you need to. Start going through that pile of "junk mail" flyers you get every week for school supplies you'll need. Spreading out the shopping over several weeks not only makes it easier on your budget, but is a good way to make sure you buy as many items as you can while they're on sale, rather than getting everything in one giant trip and only buying a few discounted items.

Make a list and stick to it. Before hitting the stores, make sure you actually need everything on your list. Many items on teachers' supply lists for the year may be lying around

your home office. Common items like scissors, rulers and simple calculators don't wear out enough in one year to justify buying new ones annually. The same rule applies to clothes. Go through the closet before deciding what needs to be replaced. Once you've narrowed down your shopping list to what you actually need, stick to it when you shop. Extra supplies and unlisted items, while they may be popular with the kids, will probably never get used and just leave your pockets empty.

Organize a back to school swap. Round up a couple of other families with kids the same gender as yours but different ages, and host an annual clothes swap. You can trade toys and books, too, for additional savings. Many schools that have uniforms organize this type of event, so be sure to check with the school office to see when and where the swap will take place, as well as the condition requirements for clothing to be swap-able.

Have the kids help. You can use back to school shopping as an opportunity to teach your kids about budgeting and price comparing. Give teens a set budget for their items, and then go through their list with them to separate the "wants" from the "needs" before shopping. Have younger children participate by decorating plain binders, folders and notebooks (which are cheaper than character-decorated items) to personalize them.



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