

Tips for Saving Money on Back to School Shopping

It's time to shop for the 2015-2016 school year! Total back to school spending for K-12 is expected to reach \$24.9 billion in 2015. The average family plans to spend over \$600 on back to school shopping this year, according to the National Retail Federation. Don't let the second-biggest shopping season of the year bust your family budget. Here are a few tips to keep your back to school shopping from squeezing the summer fun out of your wallet.

Spread Out the Spending

Going back to school shopping last minute is a sure-fire way to spend more than you need to. Start early to take advantage of sales. Spread out the purchases over several weeks to ease the burden on your budget. Splitting the cost between two or even three months can make a big difference and keep you from needing to forego other spending during the season. Be sure to save those receipts, though! Shopping over several weeks also increases your chances of being able to take advantage of price matching at competing retailers.

Watch for Sales

Start going through that pile of "junk mail" flyers you get every week for school supplies that you'll need. Don't forget to look online, and watch for clothing sales, too. Outlet malls and consignment or resale stores are great places to get quality clothing for less money. You should also wait until after school starts to buy the bulk of new clothes. One or two new outfits will suffice for the first couple weeks of school, until prices go down when the new winter inventory arrives.

Be open to refurbished versions of big-ticket items like graphing calculators, computers and tablets. These gently used items often come at discounts of up to 40 percent, and many retailers still offer a warranty on them. Similarly, if your child needs a school uniform, ask the school if there is an organized uniform-swap event. If not, call

around to other parents and see if anyone is willing to join in. Exchanging gently used outfits each year will save everyone money!

Stick to the List

Most school districts and teachers distribute a list of specific items their students will need throughout the year. Print off the applicable list and take the time to go through it before you get to the store. Sort through last year's supplies and check off any items that you can reuse. That notebook from last year with only seven pages filled? Recycle it for one of this year's classes. Pens, pencils and markers don't have to be brand new, either. If they still work, wait to buy until you actually need new ones. Once you've narrowed your list down to what you truly need, stick to it. Avoid impulse purchases.

Finally, use this opportunity to teach your kids about personal finance. Give older children 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. This real-world practice helps develop budgeting and problem-solving skills.



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