



More Saving. Better Living

Back to School Shopping Survival Guide

6 ways to take the stress out of back to school shopping

Back to school shopping doesn't have to be a stressful experience. With a few simple tips and strategies, you can make back to school shopping more efficient, less of a hassle, and even easier on your wallet.

1. Make a list

One of the best ways to minimize the stress of back to school shopping is by making a list of the back to school supplies and other items your child will need for fall as early as possible, preferably at the start of summer. Then, you can slowly cross off the items you get as you approach the start of school.

Hint: When making your list, look beyond the back to school supplies you'll need. Check his rain boots to see if they are fitting snugly now (if so, you may need to get a pair for him to grow into in the next school year). Try to remember the things that could've been useful last year (such as a better alarm clock for your child's room or a bigger calendar for his desk) and include those items on the list.

2. Know your shopping style

If you're the kind of person who thrives on making your way down a crowded aisle and picking out bargains, then more power to you. In that case, you might do well to see what kind of sales might materialize as we get closer to August and September. On the other hand, if you know that fighting crowds of other harried and stressed out parents at the stores during the first weeks back to school is your idea of a personal purgatory, then do your best to get the bulk of your back to school shopping done early and pick up any remaining small items at a pharmacy or local stationery store.

3. See what can be reused

Is your child's backpack still in good shape? Can his jackets be handed down to younger siblings or given to cousins or friends? And what items can you get from friends and family in exchange for your child's gently used school supplies, gear, and clothing? Reusing items not only saves money, but is also a great way to live a little greener, and put into practice the earth friendly philosophy many families try to adopt today.

4. Shop early and buy only what you need

You know that old saying about the early bird getting the worm? Well in this case, the early bird can reduce back to school shopping stress by getting a jump start on shopping.

Many schools post a list of required items as early as the summer. If yours does not, then give some thought to what you can buy now and what to put off till later.



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For instance, you know that your child will need pencils and erasers and pads of paper. Many schools also ask parents to supply boxes of tissues, pencils, glue, and other school supplies throughout the year. Scan store circulars and keep an eye out for email alerts about sales on back to school supplies that you know you'll need and put off buying the spiral notebooks that are on sale because your child's teacher may ask kids to buy a composition notebook instead.

5. Go online

For busy parents, the ability to shop for school supplies online may be one of the biggest lifesavers ever invented. It saves time by allowing us to shop without having to drive to from store to store looking for what we want or standing on lines. And the convenience factor is indisputable. We can bargain hunt or compare prices, check for availability or read customer reviews, and even look for specific items such as eco-friendly school supplies, all from the comfort of home when we have a few minutes, like after the kids go to bed. I can't imagine back to school shopping without it.

6. Spread out your spending

Trying to buy every single thing your child might need for the whole school year by the first day of school will only cause unnecessary stress for you and for your household budget. To take the pressure off, find out what your child absolutely needs for her first day of school, buy basic items such as pencils, erasers, and paper when they're on sale, and hold off on the rest until you see a sale. Bonus: many stores overstock back to school supplies so you may be able to find great bargains after the back to school rush is over