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## Budget-Friendly School Shopping Tips

[Move to the head of the class with these A+ tips for back-to-school shopping.](#)

by Patti Ghezzi



Back-to-school shopping is a fun way to get students excited about a new school year. But buying too much in one shot can be a budget-buster for families and a stress trigger for children.

Carolyn Dalgliesh, a Rhode Island-based professional organizer, suggests spreading out back-to-school buying over as long as three months, beginning the month before school starts. That softens the blow to your wallet and ensures that you buy only what your child really needs. She offers the following tips to save money and reduce the stress of back-to-school shopping.

### School Supplies

**Before school starts:** Before you go shopping, think about what you are and aren't willing to compromise on. If your child wants a notebook with a celebrity on the cover, be prepared to say yes or no. Stand your ground on what's important to you, but be willing to let small annoyances go, Dalgliesh says.

Let your child choose a few inexpensive items you know she'll need, as well as a new lunch box and backpack if last year's models just won't do. To save time and money, consider picking up the rest of the items on the school supply list without your child.

**One month in:** The first month of school is about establishing a daily schedule and morning routine, Dalgliesh says. Invest in supplies that will help your child get organized. For example, laminate a morning schedule and post it where he can't miss it.

If your middle schooler is disorganized, attack the problem at its root: the locker. "It's a closet at school," Dalgliesh says. Magnetic products that hold pencils, pens, and other necessities work wonders.

**Two months in:** Create a homework station and stock it with the necessary supplies. Consider a laminated homework

schedule with built-in breaks. Make the station an inspirational place for your child, reflective of her personality.

## Clothing

**Before school starts:** Let your child choose a fun back-to-school outfit or several new clothing pieces. Don't buy an entire fall wardrobe. In most places, summer clothes will be suitable for a few more weeks or months.

Avoid the dreaded power struggle by giving your picky kid a budget. Let her decide whether to use the money to buy several lower-cost items or a single pricey one.

**One month in:** Now that your child has seen what the other students are wearing, she may crave a few trendy pieces. Look for sales and coupons—yes, they exist even after the initial back-to-school rush.

Check consignment shops and thrift stores. If your child is embarrassed to wear used clothing, show her how you can find items with the tags still hanging. Emphasize how much further a budget will go in the secondhand market.

**Two months in:** Cold-weather items such as winter coats will start appearing in stores. Take an inventory of what you already have so you can just fill in the gaps.

If your child needs special clothing and gear for sports, try to pick up these items as hand-me-downs, especially if your child is trying a sport for the first time.

The back-to-school shopping season often takes on the frantic pace of the weeks before Christmas. By pacing your purchases over a few months, you can make more thoughtful decisions and give you and your child time to figure out the tools he needs to do his best and be happy in school.

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