

Do Your Homework before going Back to School Shopping

Back to school shopping can be expensive, especially if you don't spend a little time doing your homework by researching, prioritizing, budgeting and choosing the right time to shop.

Parents and caregivers should approach school-supply shopping the same way the shop for groceries. Do an inventory on what you already have and then make a list of what you need and try not to deviate from it. Figure out how much you can spend and stick to the budget. Avoid impulse buying.

Most schools provide students with a list of supplies needed and some schools provide premade packets already put together that can save time and money.

If parents shop with their children, they should try to "tune out" any whining and begging and explain to them why you won't be buying items they don't need.

This can be difficult, but it may also be a good teachable moment that parents can show their children the difference between items they need and items they want. This can also teach children how parents have to budget their money.

Here are some tips from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Specialist, Dr. Joyce Cavanagh, on how to be a more cost-conscious back to school shopper:

- Check through drawers and closets to take inventory of school supplies and clothing that you already have.
- Prepare a list of items needed and prioritize them. Some items such as backpacks may not be needed, if the one your children already has is in good shape.
- Comparison shop. Look at various ads for sales and specials. Check newspapers, circulars and online sites for coups. Many stores offer price and/or coupon matching.
- You can buy many basic school supplies at dollar stores and thrift stores. If your budget is tight, resale stores and thrift shops are good places for clothes.
- Shop at the right time. Many supplies are on sale before the back to school rush. Also sales tax holidays such as this weekend can help.
- Many communities offer back to school events where school supplies can be purchased at a lower cost or even free.
- You can often find good deals on items if you can wait until the back-to-school rush is over, after school starts. Often time there are items on sale and you can save a lot of money.

If you have children who are attending college, textbooks and supplies can be an added expense. Many times there are places you can purchase used books at a resale bookstore or by shopping online. There are sites that you can also buy digital copies of the textbooks and download to a e-reader. There are also sites that you can resell books when you are finished with them.