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never underestimate the power of caring

Back to School Shopping

Spending is quick. Earning is slow.

Russian proverb

As the back-to-school countdown begins, do you have a budget for back-to-school supplies? How do you decide what's important—and what's not? Consider these ideas.

Tips for . . .

all parents

- Check supply lists posted on school websites so that you can buy exactly what your child needs. If your school doesn't have them on line, many stores that sell back to school supplies have lists for each grade at the store.
- Be intentional about which items are included in your back-to-school budget. Items might include school supplies (such as notebooks, pencils, etc.), clothing, electronics, school fees, sporting equipment, and/or transportation costs.
- Watch for back-to-school supply sales. These often start in mid-summer.

parents with children ages birth to 5

- Although children at this age stay at home, go to child care, or attend a preschool year round, it's often helpful to mark the season by getting a new set of crayons or washable markers for your child. This gives your child the message that education is important and that soon he or she will be going to the "big school" with the "big kids."
- If you have an older child, bring your younger child with you to purchase school supplies. Buy a couple of inexpensive supplies for your younger child as well. This makes each of them feel important.
- When your child starts preschool or some type of early childhood school, make a big deal about it. Before your child attends, go to the store and purchase a couple of school supplies to show that you value education.

parents with children ages 6 to 9

- If your school has strict rules about school supplies (such as only plain coloured notebooks and yellow, number two pencils), consider letting your child purchase one decorative folder and a decorative pencil to use at home for homework.
- If you have trouble affording school supplies, check with your school. Many communities now offer school supplies for low-income families through the "Tools for Schools" program.

- Buy extra school supplies while they're on sale. Kids can be hard on their supplies, and you may find that they've used up their supplies or lost them by the middle of the school year, when prices are much higher. If you buy extra supplies, tuck them away so that your child doesn't get into them before mid-year.

parents with children ages 10 to 15

- If your school doesn't offer a school planner, get one for your child. Children at this age are notorious for being disorganized and for losing track of assignments and papers. A planner can help.
- If you need to choose which school supplies to invest in and which ones you can buy cheaply, invest in a good backpack. Your child will use it every day, and backpacks tend to go through a lot of wear and tear. You want to make sure the backpack will last, as well as be comfortable.
- If your child wants to buy school supplies with friends, or without you, have a firm budget and split up the shopping trips so your child doesn't spend all the money on a few items all at once (many young teenagers will think it's more important to have designer jeans than enough notebooks and pencils).

parents with children ages 16 to 18

- Even though teenagers at this age can shop on their own, it's often wise to still have a say in their school supply shopping. Again, if teenagers had their choice, they'd skimp on the supplies they actually need and spend money on what they think is "fun" or "in style."
- School supplies can really take a leap in price for this age group, particularly if your teen is taking Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes. Schools often know the cheapest place to buy these supplies, make sure you ask.
- Ask about fees whenever your teen goes out for a school sport, music group, or club. With school budget cuts these days, many of these have multiple fees that can become quite high. You'll be better-informed before the activity starts, and less likely to be surprised by costs that crop up along the way.

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