



My five year old son starts school this year. Any saving tips that you can recommend?

Suzie, WA

The first day of school is always an exciting time ... but can also be an expensive one. To a parent, school means costly text books, stationery, uniforms, school fees and a whole lot more. It can cause a fair bit of strain on the family budget.

But with a bit of planning and smart shopping, it can be made easier. Here are some smart savings tips:

Shop around during the sales

Make sure though that you don't go overboard and buy things that are not needed or rarely used. Recycle stationery items that are already around the house.

Buy pre-loved

Shakespeare's words have not changed over the years, so you may as well buy books second hand rather than brand new. Your kids may even benefit from having some key points already highlighted for them! Definitely buy rarely worn items, such as blazers, second hand.

Beware of "special" leasing deals

Computers are big ticket items and make a real dent in the cashflow. Stores realise this and offer leasing/rental alternatives which may seem pretty cheap on a weekly rental figure (such as \$12/week). But these deals may have implied interest rates as high as 50%. Don't get caught out.

Shop online

Auction websites like eBay and Grays Online are great for finding huge bargains for items such as programmable calculators and laptops. Try and buy items in "off-peak" times as lower demand usually results in lower prices. You may be able to buy everything from school without leaving home.

Car pooling

No point in 4 mums bringing each of their kids to school each day by car when one mum can do the trick. Save petrol and give the other mums a bit of relax time.

Education Tax Refund

Take advantage of the 50% concession for certain education expenses up to \$750 for primary school children (\$1,500 for secondary school kids). But don't spend purely for the tax deduction. Only buy if it will be used & is necessary. For information on eligibility, go to www.educationtaxrefund.gov.au

Make it, don't buy it

Making the kids' lunches each day is a cheaper (and probably healthier) alternative than buying from the canteen. Give them a treat every now and then to compensate.

Bigger is better

Buy clothes in larger sizes so that those growing bodies get greater wear out of them and last for longer.

Buy less, wash more

Instead of outlaying for 5 shirts, why not buy only a few and rotate them every other day. If you have a big family you are probably washing clothes regularly anyway.

Prepare for 2011 now

Start an education savings account now and put a regular amount from each pay packet so that next year's back-to-school is easier.