



Keeping Up Appearances - dressing kids well on a low budget

By Nancy Bradford-Sisson

A. Planning is essential to keeping the budget on track. Stretching dollars is challenging when clothing may not even have a chance to wear out. The first step is to take an inventory by looking through the current wardrobe for items that are worn out, need repairs or don't fit. Sort the clothing into three groups: one for currently wearable items, one for clothes that are okay but need repairs, and one for clothes that are disliked, worn out or don't fit. Only return clothes back into drawers/closets that can (and will) be worn. Check the not wearable clothes to see if they can be passed on to another family

member, mended or repaired so they are wearable or sold at a yard sale. Put the clothing identified for repairs in a visible location and set a reasonable time frame for repairing.

Growing children need clothing that is easy to care for, durable, comfortable and practical. Buying only what is needed will be based on the number of outfits a child typically goes through in a day, plus the frequency of launderings for the family. If laundry is done once a week and a child goes through two outfits a day, that child will need 14 outfits/week. The number will vary based on the age of the child. Babies may need three to four outfits/day, children ages 7 to 10 may need only one. Read and follow care labels on clothes to extend their life.

Kids like clothes that feel comfortable, fit properly and allow free movement. Color is second to fit in children's clothing preferences. Younger children like bright and primary colors. Clothes that are easy to put on and take off help children become independent.

To get the most for your money while your child is growing, look for these features: undefined waistline or partial elastic waistbands; armholes that are larger; raglan style sleeves; two-piece garments; deep hems or cuffs; long tails on shirts and blouses; no tight cuffs or bands; stretch or knit fabrics; adjustable shoulder straps. (It also helps the budget to buy children fewer items during growth spurts.)

Be aware of safety concerns while clothes shopping too. Clothing should not be big or so loose that it could become caught during play. Avoid: big sleeves and pockets, or loosely attached belts/sashes; drawstrings located anywhere; skirts or pants so long they create tripping problems and caps or hoods that obscure vision.

The UNH Cooperative Extension Making Money Work For You workbook offers the following tips for saving money on clothes:

- Buy only because you need the clothing and only those items that will fit into the present wardrobe.

- Buy usable clothing from thrift shops, garage sales or discount centers.
- Make your necessary purchases during sale time: clearance, end-of-month, or end-of-season.
- Exchange clothing with others.
- Buy versatile clothes that will expand the wardrobe; i.e. a sweater that can be worn with both a skirt or a pair of pants.
- Instead of buying new clothing, buy accessories that can give a new look to the clothes that are in the closet.
- Buy multi-season clothes, e.g., all-weather coats with zip-in-linings.
- Buy minimum care clothing: washable, dark colors. Dark clothing usually shows wear less than light colors – especially coats, pants, etc. Always check the “care” label before purchasing an item.
- Consider saving by sewing your own clothes, but estimate costs carefully. You may be able to buy certain items on sale for less than you would spend on fabric.
- Learn or improve sewing skills through adult education classes.

Nancy Bradford-Sisson is the Family & Consumer Resources Educator for UNH Cooperative Extension, Cheshire County. For more information, call your county extension office or visit <http://extension.unh.edu>