

Kids



From diapers to growth spurts to moving out for college or a career, kids can create a lot of waste at every stage of life. Luckily, just like in any other aspect of your life, you can also find ways to minimize this waste.

New baby

While manufacturers and marketers want you to believe there is an endless array of items that you need to welcome your new baby, there are few truly essential baby products. Some examples of nonessential items and alternatives include:

- **Baby care timers:** Skip the expense and use a pen and piece of paper or apps like Total Baby and Baby Geek (there may be a small fee). These serve the same purpose at a fraction of the cost.
- **Baby food processor:** A regular food processor or blender will do the exact same thing as the baby version, and you can use it long after your little one is off baby food.
- **Baby laundry detergent:** Choosing a regular “free and clear” product or making your own will save you money and time because you can throw the baby’s laundry in with the rest of the family’s dirty clothes. See the recipes section for a laundry detergent recipe.
- **Bottle drying rack:** A regular dish rack works just fine without the additional expense and counter space.
- **Changing table:** if you’d like a changing area, secure a changing pad onto a low dresser, which you can continue to use after your child is out of diapers.
- **Crib bumpers:** Go without bumpers. According to the U.S. Product Safety

Commission, crib bumpers have caused a number of death and injuries in babies 2 years old or younger. The study found that many infants lack the motor development needed to free themselves when they become wedged between the bumper pad and another surface. If the pads are too soft, the baby’s nose or face can get pressed up against it, causing suffocation. If they are too firm, the baby can climb up on the pads and fall out of the crib.

- **Diaper bag:** Although you will need something to carry your child’s essentials around in, it doesn’t need to be a bag specifically designed as a diaper bag. A backpack, messenger bag or large purse will do the trick, is more likely to match your personal style, and is more useful in the long run.
- **Diaper disposal system:** If you empty your trash regularly, a regular household trash can will do. For poopy diapers, flush the solid waste down the toilet to get rid of the main source of bad smells. If using cloth diapers, rinse and store them in a bucket with a vinegar and water solution until laundering time.
- **Wipe warmer:** You can sufficiently warm wipes with your hands a few seconds before using, or use warm water with a reusable wipe to avoid the added expense of a wipe warmer and the electricity it requires.

This list is by no means exhaustive. When assessing whether an item is needed, consider whether you already have items that will serve the same purpose. If you really feel you need an item, consider getting it used and pass it on to someone else to use when you are done.

Most reuse retailers, including Arc's Value Village, Goodwill and Salvation Army, will not accept or sell certain baby equipment such as car seats, cribs and strollers due to product safety standards. If you are considering getting these items used, be sure to check models for recalls and research recommendations for product lifespan as it relates to safety. For example, the Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends against using cribs that are older than 10 years. Remember that there are lots of ways to reduce waste with a new baby without compromising their safety.

Diapers

Cloth diapers have come a long way in the past 10 years. Gone are the pins and oversized plastic pants, replaced by a dizzying array of styles and designs. In fact, they are now as easy to put on your child as their disposable counterparts and arguably much more stylish. Cloth diapers do need to be washed, so they are without a doubt more work for parents than tossing a disposable.

So why consider cloth diapering? First, they save money. The average family spends \$3,000 to \$4,000 per child on disposable diapers. Cloth diapers have a one-time cost of \$100 to \$1,500, depending on the style. Cloth diapers can be used for multiple children, so a family can easily save thousands of dollars by switching to cloth. Second, they are low-waste. For families with kids using disposable diapers, about 50 percent of their weekly trash consists of disposable diapers. So although using reusable diapers is definitely a commitment, it has significant benefits. Additionally, cloth diapers have resale value, so many people regain part of their investment by selling them when they are no longer needed.

For information on where to buy cloth diapers, what styles work best and cloth diapering troubleshooting, visit the local blog clothdiaperguru.blogspot.com.

“My family lived in a 6-unit building with shared laundry when our son was born. We wanted to use cloth diapers without grossing out all of the other residents in the building, so we came up with a system of presoaking the diapers in our apartment before they were laundered. Rather than collect a big pile of diapers in a diaper bin, we used a 5 gallon pail to presoak the diapers in a water and vinegar solution. Not only did this pre-clean the diapers a bit, it also cut back on the smells typical of storing them in a diaper pail. We also rinsed the dirty diapers prior to soaking them. Once we’d collected a bucket full, we dumped them all in the tub, rung them out and then took them down to the laundry to wash them. Cloth diapering was definitely more work than disposable, but it’s far cheaper in the long run, especially if you have more than one kid. And you’ll never have to worry about running out late in the night to buy a pack of diapers when you realize you’ve run out” – dad in Minneapolis



Toys

When purchasing toys, check thrift stores, garage sales and online exchanges for gently used toys, and remember to pass them on to someone else for reuse when your child is done playing with them. Focus on durable toys that won't break easily, and always be aware of which toys have batteries and can't go in the trash. Remember, if a toy emits lights, sound, or drives without winding up, it has a battery. Remove or replace batteries in these toys when they stop working. It may be easiest to avoid these toys as sometimes you can't access the battery and keep the toy intact.



Consider joining the Minneapolis Toy Library (information at mplstoylibrary.org) to reduce waste, prevent clutter and save money. Being a member of the toy library means your kids will get new toys every few weeks that match their development stage.

Back to school

Back-to-school time can be hectic and expensive. But luckily, new-to-you clothing and school supplies can often be purchased without compromising quality or style.

Before school starts, get a list of needed school supplies from your child's school. Reuse any supplies that you have left over from the previous year. Be sure to take a list with you for any remaining supplies to avoid buying items you don't need. Look for items made with recycled content, durable materials and those that come in little or no packaging. If the item does come packaged, choose items with recyclable packaging.

The Hennepin County Choose to Reuse Campaign offers discounts at a variety of local reuse retailers to help you save even more on back-to-school items like sports gear, clothing and electronics. The campaign runs from August through the end of October, just in time to get kids back to school without breaking the bank.

For older students, look for required books at libraries, used book stores and online resellers. Some college bookstores also offer used books, which can be a big savings for college-bound kids. For computers and tablets, consider buying refurbished ones.

Clothes

Babies and kids grow quickly, and all too often those boots you bought on sale last spring end up not fitting when winter comes. Finding gently used clothes at secondhand stores, garage sales, online sale sites or getting them from friends and family will save money and prevent waste. And, once your kids outgrow them, you can pass them on to someone else to reuse.

Remember to fix items such as small tears, missing buttons and broken zippers. Visit a Hennepin County Fix-It Clinic for free assistance with mending. Find information at hennepin.us/fixitclinic.

"The knees of my son's pants are inevitably worn through by the end of the school year. Rather than pitch them, I cut the legs off at the knee for instant shorts – saves me money and allows us to get more wear out of them. I recycle the cut off legs and the remaining shorts when they are too small by dropping them off with my textile recycling."

– Minneapolis resident



Low-waste lunches

There are lots of alternatives to packaged convenience foods that are lower cost, lower waste and often healthier. These options can be incorporated into lunches for grown-ups as well.

Pack lunches, including sandwiches and snacks, in reusable containers rather than plastic bags. Choose durable bottles for drinks and fill them with tap water or other beverages. Include reusable forks, spoons and cloth napkins. Try to avoid these common prepackaged convenience foods: bottled water, candy, chips, fruit snacks, granola bars, individually wrapped snacks, juice boxes, Lunchables™ or similar boxed lunches, microwaveable frozen meals, packaged sandwiches, squeezable fruit pouches and smoothies, and yogurt.

Involve your kids in making their lunches. Not only will this cut down on the work for you, but they will be more likely to eat something they have helped create. Make enough food for several lunches at one time, or make lunches the night before to avoid running out of time in the morning.

Encourage your family to bring home any food in their lunch they didn't eat to have later. Serve leftover food as snacks, incorporate into new meals or send it again the next day for lunch.

For ideas on what to pack and containers to pack it in, visit a blog such as 100 Days of Real Food at 100daysofrealfood.com/school-lunches.



“When my son gets home from school and asks for a snack, we first check his lunch and have him eat whatever he skipped before we offer him more food. If fruit or veggies get brown or mushy from sitting in his lunch all day, we set them aside for smoothies, stir-fries or roasted veggies. If my son isn’t hungry, we often include what’s left in his lunch on his plate at dinner. This ensures he eats healthy and we prevent wasted food.” – mom from St. Louis Park