

By Jane McBride Choate

**B**udgeting for your family's clothing needs can be a challenge, especially during times of economic uncertainty. Although most families can scale back on their clothing purchases, some needs must still be met. Learn or sharpen the following skills to clothe your growing family.

**1. Learn to sew and mend.** Almost lost arts, these skills are necessary to make good use of existing clothing and fabrics. Although it may not always be cost-effective to sew your own clothes, you can save money by doing your own alterations and repairs. By learning how to sew, you can also custom-make items for family members with special needs, hard-to-find sizes, or distinctive tastes.

**2. Swap.** Invite other families with children of similar ages to swap clothing with you. Each family contributes good, usable clothing, and the families "swap shop" at a central meeting place. Any remaining items can be donated to Desert Industries or another charity.

**3. Put the word out.** Let friends and other family members know you'd love to receive any clothing they may have outgrown or don't use. Even if you can't use a particular item, accept it graciously and donate it to a thrift store.

**4. Sell used clothing.** If you do not trade or have opportunities to share

clothing, consignment shops and garage sales are good ways to sell used clothing. Earnings can then be used to replenish other clothing needs.

**5. Be thrifty.** Shop your local thrift stores and garage sales. Sometimes you can find new clothes with the tags still attached. Ask if the store offers dollar days or other incentives. And don't be afraid to bargain at yard sales.

**6. Cyber-shop.** You can find good prices on clothing and accessories at many Internet sites. Before you log on, though, have a specific plan and budget for what you need to purchase.

**7. Shop outlet malls and discount stores.** Be price savvy, since not all of these stores will have bargains. But some do, and I especially like to shop end-of-season clearance sales for next year's clothing needs. For growing children, buy one or more sizes up. You can justify storing well-made outfits for a year if they're half price or less.

**8. Get on mailing lists.** Many of your favorite stores are happy to send you information and coupons for upcoming sales. Shop judiciously and remember that nothing is a bargain if you don't have the money or if you don't need it or can't use it. Save for your clothing purchases and search for the best deals on items you truly need. ■



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