The start of school is upon us and with that comes the inevitable school shopping.

Did you realize that the average family spends $670 per student for a grand total of $76 billion that will be added to the U.S. economy? School shopping season has become the second most popular time to shop.

Things haven’t been rosy in the economy over the last few years. Maybe we’ve made the corner since 76 percent of school shoppers feel that their financial situation is better or at least the same as last year. However, with the recent fluctuations in the stock market, it isn’t a time to spend money like you have an unlimited budget. There are some easy ways to save money this shopping season.

Find out what still works. Go on a fact-finding mission in your child’s room. Dig through the desk and leftovers from last year and see what can be used. Check supplies against the school supplies list. The average school supplies list has more than 18 items, so if you don’t have to buy some items, you will conserve money to spend on something else. Reusing items is eco-friendly and a budget saver.

Try on clothes and see what fits and is still serviceable. Now is the time to be ruthless in culling. If something is in good shape (no rips, tears, missing buttons or stains) but no longer fits, set it aside — don’t put it back in the closet. Make a list of items that need to be added.

Before you trot off to your favorite stores, consider secondhand garments. Trade those still serviceable items with another family for some of the correct size. Or take them to one of our local consignment shops and trade them for ones in the correct size. Thrift stores and garage sales are another cost-effective way to outfit your child for school.

Watch for sales. Our local stores are chock full of bargains and the latest fashions. Go there next to fill in the gaps in the closet and in the school supplies list. Concentrate on
getting good prices on the big ticket items. Every store is going to have great prices on crayons and pencils. In fact, that is one of the ways they get you through the door. They price pencils or crayons at a great price with the hope that you don’t look too carefully at the rest of the prices. A good price on a backpack will save you far more money than a good price on crayons. Don’t be charmed by the loss leader.

It is a good time to stock up on discounted products for the whole family — even if family members aren’t going back to school. This is the time that I check prices on jeans, underwear and socks, though my family hasn’t been in school in many moons. It is also a great time to stock up on items that might be given as Christmas presents. Markers, pencils and other school supplies make great stocking stuffers.

While you are shopping, don’t forget to use the time to teach shopping and budgeting skills. Give older students a budget and let them make their choices. It’s a great way to let them learn how much items cost and teach family values concerning money. Younger students can also learn to budget by helping decide what is most important to them to purchase. They may find that last year’s backpack will do fine if they can have those new shoes that they want.

School is here. Don’t you see all the parents cheering?

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