

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 their life. Luckily, just like in any other aspect of your life, you can also find ways to minimize this waste.

One of the best strategies for low-waste parenting is to focus on applying your low-waste mindset and taking advantage of all the reuse opportunities. When assessing whether an item is needed, consider what you already have and if that can be repurposed for your child's needs. If you need a new item, check with any friends or family who have slightly older children, check online sale and Buy Nothing groups, or visit reuse retailers. From clothing to toys to books to sporting gear, there's a wide array of items you can find used that are still in great shape. All of these options can also be a good way to pass items on to someone else when you are done.

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 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.
- **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.
- **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 wide 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 need to be washed, so they do require more work for parents than tossing a disposable. However, as with many things related to living a low-waste lifestyle, the routine will seem easier once you get into the habit. Another good option can be to use a cloth diaper washing service such as Do Good Diapers

Cloth diapers can 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.

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 long-term benefits. Additionally, cloth diapers have resale value, so many people regain part of their investment by selling them when they are no longer needed. This also means you can easily find cloth diapers secondhand to save money. If you use a diaper service, you essentially rent the diapers so you do not need to worry about buying or selling them.

Also similar to many low-waste lifestyle habits, reusable diapers don't have to be an all-or-nothing choice. Many people using cloth diapers still occasionally use disposable diapers. Sometimes they will use disposable diapers overnight or while children are at daycare or on trips out of the house. Every time you use a cloth diaper it saves one from going in the trash, so you can use a combination of the two while still preventing waste.

For information on where to get cloth diapers, what styles work best and cloth diapering troubleshooting, visit the site Dirty Diaper Laundry (dirtydiaperlaundry.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 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 prefolds 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 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 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 no longer needs 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, plus easily accessible batteries pose a deadly risk to children and pets if swallowed.



Consider joining a toy library, such as the Minneapolis Toy Library, to reduce waste, prevent clutter and save money. The Minneapolis Toy Library is a lending program where member families can borrow toys that are geared toward children from birth to five years old. Learn more at mplstoylibrary.org. 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.

For older students, look for required books at libraries, used book stores and online resellers. Some college bookstores also offer used books, which can lead to a big savings! For computers and tablets, consider buying used or refurbished ones while also troubleshooting and repairing any you have that are slow or damaged.