

Money Savers For New Parents



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Money Savers for New Parents: Tips for Raising Baby without Breaking the Bank!

Children may be priceless, but they also are expensive. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, raising a child to the age of 18 will set the average family back nearly a quarter million dollars!

The first year of parenthood alone can be a shocker. Between diapers, formula, car seats, nursery furnishings, sitters and clothes they outgrow weekly, you may wonder how you'll ever afford to raise your child to adulthood! With some planning, though, you can keep those first-year costs down and maybe even sock something away for college. Here are some strategies:

Clothing:

Your baby may look darling in designer duds, but they won't last long. Between spit up and growth spurts, you'll find most outfits don't get a lot of use. Don't be shy about accepting hand-me-downs, shopping garage sales, and especially shopping end-of-season sales for next year's clothes.

Feeding:

Breastfeeding is considered the healthiest option for your child and best of all, it's free. In fact, it can save you as much as \$1000 the first year compared to the cost of

formula. In addition, you may save money on doctor's bills since breast milk has been shown to keep babies healthier. If you must return to work, you may want to consider renting an electric breast pump – the savings on formula will easily offset the cost.

If you find you need to buy formula, talk with your doctor about options. Some brands are cheaper than others, but make sure you have your doctor's OK first. You may be able to get samples and coupons while you're still in the hospital; and be sure to sign up for coupons at the major manufacturer's websites. Be careful about stocking up ahead of time, however, unless you can return unopened formula. It may take several tries to find a brand that works for your infant.

When your child is ready for solid food, pureeing your own fruits and vegetables costs pennies compared to baby food in cans and jars. You can freeze these in ice cube trays then put in containers for individual servings when you need them.

Diapering:

While many parents today cringe at the thought of washing old-fashioned cloth diapers, the savings may make you reconsider. According to Good Morning America financial contributor Melody Hobson, cloth diapers and laundering will run about \$1160 the first 2.5

years, while the cost of disposables is likely to be closer to \$1800.

If you must go with disposable diapers, many parents find the cheaper store brands to be just as reliable as the more expensive brand name ones. You can also buy inexpensive inserts that will turn a regular diaper into a more absorbent nighttime one. Whatever you end up buying, stock up when diapers are on sale. You don't have to wait until after junior arrives – you can start buying diapers on sale when you get pregnant. You'll need them!

Toys:

Almost any experienced parent will tell you, the more expensive the toy, the less likely their child was to play with it! While you may feel you're shortchanging your baby if you don't buy him the latest educational toys, the truth is your child can do just fine with less – especially until they get older and start wanting what everyone else has. Garage sales and thrift stores are full of toys that were very expensive but got little use. Buy those!

Gear:

Open any baby catalog and you'll find all kinds of gadgets promising to make your baby happier and smarter, or your life as a parent easier. While some may turn out to be useful, others probably won't get used at all. You may find, for example, that your baby doesn't like the \$100

swing or the \$75 baby sling you thought you had to have. If a friend recommends one of these items that worked for her child, ask if you can borrow hers for a few days before you buy. When you do buy new items, ask about return policies and save your receipts in case you need to return or exchange them.

Daycare:

The cost of daycare can easily top a year at a public university. If you are certain both parents will work after your child is born, start investigating daycare options now. Ask for recommendations from everyone you know. Visit the daycares during the day, consider commuting times and expenses and don't be afraid to ask about discounts or scholarships. If your job schedule isn't very flexible, make sure you also line up sick-child care. Your local hospital may be able to recommend a program of that type or ask other mothers what they do.

Some parents find that by the time they factor in the cost of daycare, it's cheaper for one parent to stay home full-time. Others may want to start their own daycare to bring in extra income. (Be careful about committing yourself to watching other children until you are in a good routine with your first child.) Another option may be to scale down to part-time work, or take an evening or weekend job if your spouse works during the day to minimize the amount of time you need to pay for child care.

Announcements:

Consider sending baby announcements online. It will be fast, cheap and maybe even easier! Free online baby announcements are available at happygreetings.net or type “cheap baby announcements” into an Internet search engine.

Decorating:

Fixing up the nursery is exciting. But, you don't have to go overboard. Investing in a good, safe crib is important. Never buy a used crib unless you can check it out for safety recalls first. If it is cracked, chipped or damaged, don't use it.

But you probably don't need a lot of fancy bedding for the crib. In fact, it's recommended for safety that babies under the age of 12 months do not have pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, pillow-like stuffed toys, or other pillow-like products in their cribs. A fitted sheet and perhaps bumper pads that can be snapped into place (take them down when your child is old enough to pull herself up) are all you'll need.

Before buying a changing table, consider whether you'll actually use one. Some parents end up using simple changing mats in other rooms rather than changing the baby in the bedroom on a table.

Before putting used furniture in a child's room, test it for possible lead contamination using a kit from your local hardware store. Also, consider a theme for the room that can be easily adapted to grow up with your child so that you don't have to completely redo it in a few short years.

Baby Sitting:

If you're not lucky enough to have family members who jump at the chance to watch your child, consider making friends with other parents who would like to swap sitting duties with you.

Check out the book *Smart Mom's Baby-Sitting Co-Op Handbook: How We Solved the Baby-Sitter Puzzle* by Gary Myers for details on how to start a babysitting cooperative.

Housing:

Many couples think they need a bigger home when they have children, but trading up to a larger, more expensive home right away may be a mistake. A higher house payment may make it more difficult for one parent to quit work to stay home with the baby, as well as putting a lot of pressure on the budget. It's better to wait for a year or two after your child is born before making that decision.

Freebies:

Sign up for the “baby club” if your local grocery store offers one, visit websites of manufacturers for baby items, fill out the registration cards that come with things you buy for your newborn, and pretty soon you’ll be inundated with free samples and coupons.

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