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## Clothing Dollars and Teenagers

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Interest in clothing increases as children progress from grade to junior high school. For many children this transition means a change of school, new friends and a great deal of insecurity. Dressing like others is one way to belong and provides a sense of satisfaction and security.

Experimenting with clothes is part of growing up. When children are young they frequently dress up like cowboys and cowgirls, firefighters and movie stars, and the clothes help them experience the role they are trying to express. In adolescence, clothing again helps them express who they want to be. Usually these roles are not permanent, but allow the teenagers to experiment.

Helping teenagers solve their clothing problems encourages independence. Showing rather than telling is a better way to help. If teenagers are encouraged to participate in the planning process and actual shopping they will feel more secure in the future. Early in the teenage years shopping together provides the opportunity to learn better buymanship—how the garment looks on the individual and in the quality of the garment.

Parents set the stage in their own buying practices; teenagers will learn the buying habits parents practice.

Assuming responsibility for the garment after it is purchased is also important. Teenagers can wash, iron and make minor repairs on their clothes as well as their parents can.

### Guidelines For Spending

In the past decade families have spent less than 10 percent of their gross income for clothing, a decline from previous years. That's due to increased costs in the family budget for food, shelter and energy. With fewer dollars available for clothing families should plan and buy carefully.

As teenagers make the transition from grade school to junior high school, they want to dress like others even though it may strain the family budget. Be careful not to purchase too much until they can see what others are wearing. Even then it is a good practice to purchase the minimum number of items possible for teenage fads change quickly. This might mean they wear it today, wash it tonight and wear it tomorrow to maximize use and dollars spent.

Clothing expenditures are greater for females than males



and peak between the ages of 16 and 24. Tables 1 and 2 show annual clothing costs for boys and girls at different ages. Chart 1 reveals how these clothing dollars are distributed to satisfy clothing needs. Consumers should realize that approximately half of their clothing dollars are spent for outerwear; the remaining half for footwear, sleepwear and underwear, wraps, hosiery and miscellaneous.

TABLE 1

1977 Clothing Budget for Farm Boys by Income Level & Age

Boy's Age	Low	Moderate	Liberal
6- 9	99	146	222
10-13	129	185	244
14-15	159	224	295
16-17	152	221	323

TABLE 2

1977 Clothing Budget for Farm Girls by Income Level & Age

Girl's Age	Low	Moderate	Liberal
6- 9	93	145	227
10-13	144	217	336
14-15	160	235	310
16-17	157	281	436

Tables 1 and 2 Source: *Family Economics Review* Winter 1979 page 13.

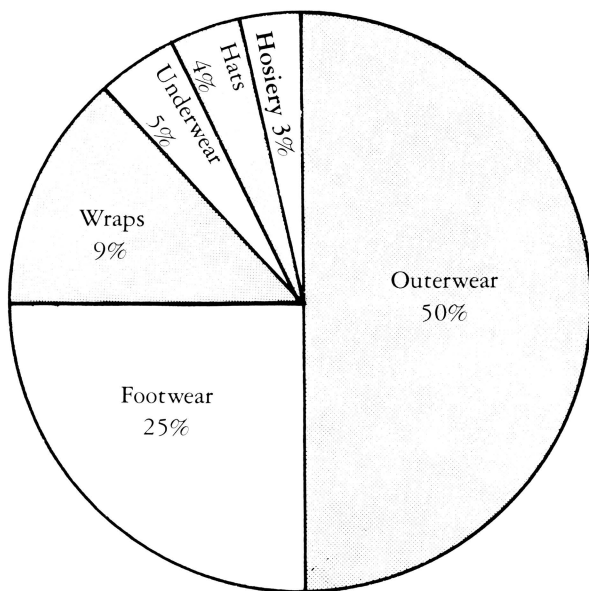


CHART 1

DISTRIBUTION OF BOY'S CLOTHING COSTS

Based on Ages 14-15, Moderate Level

Source: Family Economics Review Winter 1979

Get Organized

It has been said that most people wear 10 percent of their wardrobe 90 percent of the time. This is further complicated with teenagers. As they grow at unpredictable rates, more clothes tend to accumulate in their closets.

Take everything out of the closet and have them determine what they can wear. Examine the wearable clothing. Does it need cleaning? Does it need repairs? Is it something they will wear? Is it an item that was worn very little? Clothes that can't be worn should be put aside for a younger child, saved for a garage sale or donated to a charity.

Put only those clothes back into the closet that are wearable. Have the teenager examine clothes that are worn very little and try to identify the reasons for such little use. These reasons are very important and should be considered when making future purchases. Little-used clothes are the most expensive ones in the wardrobe. The real value of clothing is determined by the number of times it is used.

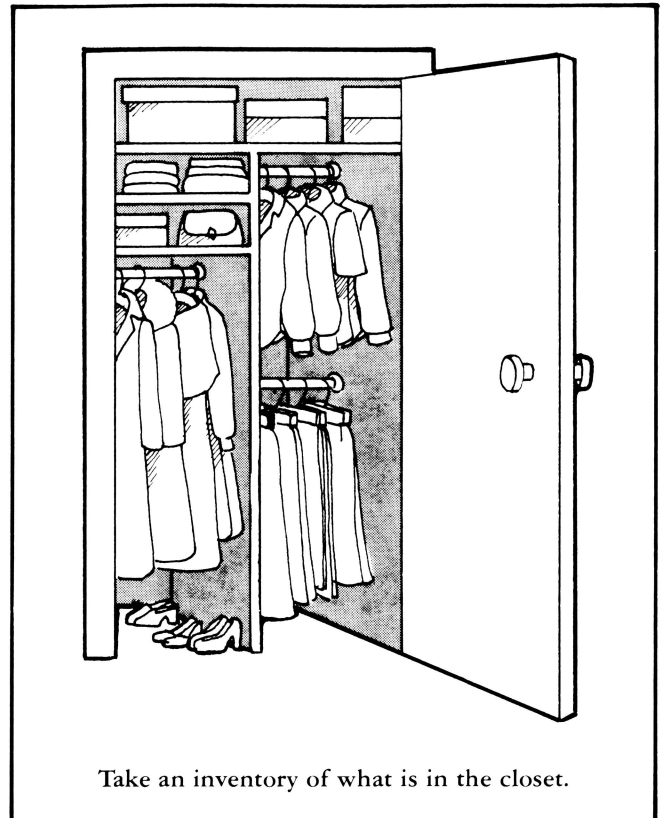
Take an inventory of what is in the closet now. Plan together what you think may be needed for the coming major season (summer or winter). Estimate the cost together (parent and teenager). Then the parent should decide a budget consistent with the overall family budget. With that amount the teenager can then prioritize the list. Remember to be honest—do you want or do you need the priority items?

Getting the closet organized can provide the opportunity to consider coordinating items that may have been overlooked due to the clutter. Keeping it organized provides continued opportunity for new combinations to be possible.

## Develop a Strategy

Half of the clothes battle is won once the wearable items are identified and the planned items prioritized. The next task is to apply some basic wardrobe principles.

1. Think about activities or lifestyle. Are different clothes needed for school, church, social activities, or sport events? The more general the clothing needs, the more dollars can be saved. As an example, blue jeans will serve more needs than riding pants.
2. Consider total clothing needs. Analysis of clothing budget data reveals that individuals spend about half of their budget for outer clothing. This means that dollars need to be set aside for night- and underwear, shoes, coats, socks or hosiery, and accessories.
3. Build the wardrobe plan around 2 or 3 "seasonless" colors such as beige, navy, brown rather than white or pale pastels.
4. Extend the wardrobe with "seasonless" fabrics and get maximum wear; choose denim, gabardine or chino for spring through fall; consider corduroy, denim, gabardine or flannel to wear fall through spring.
5. Learn to mix and match; coordinate separates for optimum use. With three coordinating garments at least nine combinations are possible! To increase mix and match possibilities, build the wardrobe around basics.
6. Read the care label on the garment. Dry cleaning adds to the cost of the garment; suede or leather coats require even more costly specialized care. The cost of garment care needs to be considered as part of the clothing budget.
7. Weigh the cost of status items such as designer jeans and shirts or name brand tennis shoes. Decide if the item will be worn twice as much as unbranded items to compensate for twice the price. The real cost of items should be figured on "cost per wearing"; items that are seldom worn are the expensive ones.
8. Invest in a few bright, colorful and inexpensive accessories to give a sparkle and currentness to the wardrobe. Items such as belts, scarves, jewelry, blouses or purse can pep up a wardrobe.
9. Calculate the cost of special events, they're generally expensive! Dances and proms call for specialized clothes that are seldom worn again. For girls the party dress is so special that it will be worn on very few occasions. College girls frequently trade or borrow party dresses; some girls sew their own dresses for a fraction of the retail price. One way to compensate is to limit the number of accessory items such as shoes, purse or coat. Boys may wish to consider renting a suit or tuxedo rather than purchase a suit. Future use, possibility of continued growth, and opportunity to pass the suit down to a younger brother might be considered in the decision making process. Suits call for coordinating shirt, tie and shoes to complete the ensemble.



Take an inventory of what is in the closet.

## Activate the Plan

The shopping experience should be a gradual acceptance of responsibilities for the teenager. Children should start sharing in the selection of their own clothes at an early age. They should not be turned loose in a store but with their parents choose several items, and then be allowed to make the final selection. As the teenagers experiences with shopping increase, the parents' role should become less.

Shopping together with teenagers provides a model for them to follow in the future. As they observe the parent plan what is to be purchased, discuss where and when to buy as well as how they plan to pay for the merchandise, many valuable lessons are learned.

As teenagers become more confident in their decisions they rely less on parents' opinions, approval or suggestions. At first these expressions are sought and their approval welcomed. Ultimately, teenagers will want to purchase their clothes alone, some mistakes will be made and not all decisions are successful ones. If the teenager is unhappy with the purchase and *if* the reason is legitimate such as poor fit, wrong color, poor workmanship then it should be returned with the sales slip to the store for exchange or refund. Another lesson learned.

## Look Around

As costs increase for food, shelter and energy, alternative clothing sources are becoming more popular. Traditionally, people purchased clothes at department, specialty and discount stores. Manufacturer's outlets, catalogs, second-owner clothing stores and sales provide alternatives to traditional buying.

**Manufacturers' outlets** have limited types of items such as

shoes, raincoats, blouses, rather than a full range of diversified merchandise. These items are generally excellent buys as the merchandise is first quality, frequently at half-price. If the manufacturer's brand label is in the item, it is not second-grade quality. If the label has been removed, check the item for flaws or poor workmanship. Many times the merchandise at outlets is production errors, or manufacturer's overruns or returns from retail stores due to over ordering.

**Catalogs** are alternatives in the sense that shopping can be done at home. Wardrobe coordination can be planned while sitting in an easy chair rather than walking from store to store. Frequently catalogs coordinate and accessorize items for the consumer. Disadvantages include not being able to try the item on for examination of fit and appearance and not being able to see the quality of fabric and workmanship. Mail order catalogs follow the sizing specified in the catalogs; therefore it is necessary to measure and follow their sizing charts. Catalog descriptions provide information about the garment style, construction, fiber content, and recommended care procedures.

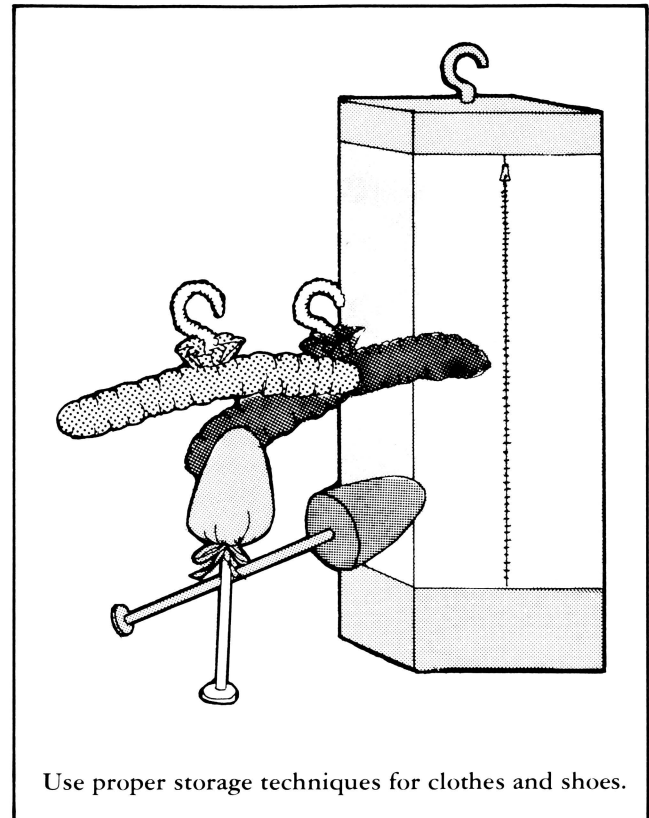
**Second-owner clothing** can stretch the clothes dollar tremendously. From garage sales to second owner boutiques bargains are available. Items such as sport coats, suits, and formals are frequently in almost new condition as teenagers frequently outgrow these items in a year or two and wear them so seldom. See GH981 "Buying and Selling at Garage Sales" for more specific guidelines on buying second-owner clothes.

**Sales** extend the clothes dollar. Buying "onsale" has increased over the past five years; men's clothing stores report that they use to sell 75 percent of their merchandise at regular price, in 1979 that figure dropped to 50 percent. Whether this trend will or can continue is uncertain. If clothing needs are established in advance and planned for these sale periods, it is possible to save up to half of the original price. As sales are spread throughout the year, it is possible to avoid buying school clothes at one time. Major sales that make an impact on the family budget are clearance, annual and special back to school sales.

**Clearance sales** generally reduce the price of the merchandise gradually over a period of a month to six weeks. The first reduction (10-25 percent) while not a great savings provides the best selection of merchandise. The last reduction (50-75 percent), the lowest price; shopping the first day of the lowest reduction can provide some real savings, providing the merchandise is needed. Semi-annual clearance sales provide the opportunity to buy for both summer and winter. As teenagers are prone to fads, one needs to buy carefully as the merchandise may not be "in style" next season. It is wise to buy very classic or basic styles on sale.

**Annual Sales** occur during the year at no specific time, generally to stimulate business. These sales are good opportunities to buy basic merchandise such as underwear, hosiery, etc. at 25 to 33 percent reduction. Sales are reliable because regular stock is on sale for a limited time.

**Special back to school sales** feature a limited variety of basic merchandise at slightly reduced prices for a short period of time. Frequently jeans, girl's school dresses, socks and underwear are featured. The customer needs to carefully check the merchandise for some slight imperfections as not all stock



may be first quality. In general these sales do help extend the clothes dollar and feature good buys.

One major caution when buying at sales - use the same critical judgment as at regular prices! Consider the need, how it fits into the existing wardrobe and examine it for quality. Return policies differ on sale merchandise - frequently it cannot be returned; it would be best to think before buying rather than have it hang, unused in the closet.

## Paying the Bill

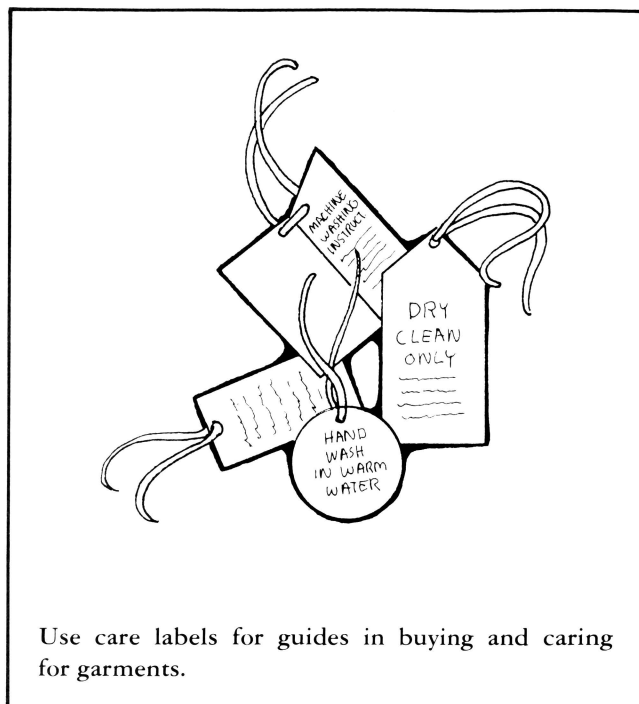
Several methods used to pay for clothing include cash, layaway, credit card and revolving credit. Where you shop determines to some extent how the clothing can be paid for. Most stores today provide some form of credit but alternative clothing sources may require cash.

Using some form of credit is a very convenient way to pay for clothing; however, credit makes it easy to overspend the clothing budget and adds to the cost of clothing if interest is paid. To teach teenagers the responsibilities of credit, credit cards or revolving credit is an important lesson.

## Storage

Saving money on clothes doesn't stop with shopping. To really maximize dollars spent, take care of the merchandise bought. Items need to be stored properly and repaired immediately.

- Increase space in the closet by creating long and short storage spaces. Put extra clothes poles at two different heights to double the space.

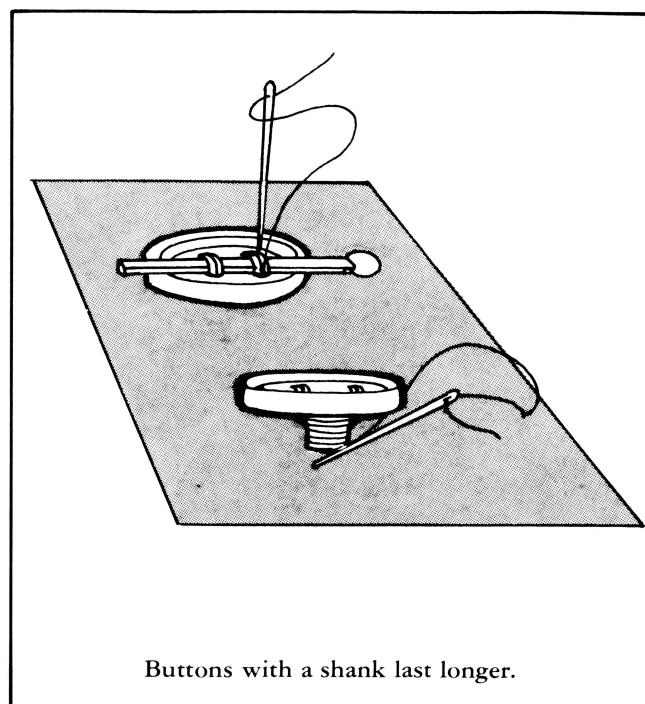


- Layer shelves above the clothes poles for storing shoes, sweaters, etc.
- Hang clothes on appropriate hangers. Use padded hangers for good clothes, wooden hangers for coats, suits and sport jackets, and rounded plastic hangers for all other items. Wire hangers are hard on clothes, ruining shoulder shape and frequently causing snags.
- Place slacks or knits over the padded bottom part of a hanger to prevent crease marks.
- Fold sweaters and place in a drawer or shelf - do not hang on a hanger or hook.
- Do not store leather products or down items in plastic bags. Use old sheets or sheet bags to protect these items.
- Hang belts, night clothes, robes, jeans on hooks for convenience.
- Store out of season garments in a separate closet or part of the closet. Store items at normal humidity (65%) and temperature (70°F-21°C) to avoid mildew or color change.
- Repair items should be hung in clear view as a reminder; so items are fixed and ready to wear when stored.

## Care and Repair

Taking care of clothes on a regular basis prolongs their life and improves their appearance. This includes regular machine and hand laundry. Pressing and ironing gives a sharp look. Simple mending isn't difficult and can be done by a novice. Teach teenagers to take care of their clothes. Their standards may not be the same as their parents but they should learn how.

Teach teenagers to read the care label inside the garment, to determine if the garment is washable (and if it is) how it should be washed. Show teenagers how to sort clothes so that the clothes will be and look clean after laundering. A few basic directions should prevent much dingy grayness, color transfer and fuzzy, linty clothes.



Hand washing is time consuming but if teenagers want to wear sweaters then they should have the responsibility to maintain them. Show teenagers how to hand wash sweaters by (1) pre-treating heavily soiled or stained areas (2) dissolving the detergent in lukewarm water (3) immersing and soaking the sweater 3-5 minutes (4) rinsing the sweater until it is detergent free (5) rolling in a terry towel to remove excess moisture (6) shaping the sweater to the original size on a flat surface and let dry on a terry towel.

## Six Easy Repairs

Buttons fall off, hems come undone, rips and tears occur - if teenagers can fix a flat tire they can learn to fix a rip in their shirt! Six how-to's are listed for teenagers to give first aid to their clothes.

**Knit snag**—do not cut the unraveled yarn! Use a pin, crochet hook or safety pin to pull the loop through to the wrong side of the garment. If the loop is cut, a run will form which will weaken the knit.

**Fuzz Balls**—fabric pills are fine fibers that have worked loose from the knit fabric but are too strong to fall off. Normally these pills fall off of wool sweaters but not synthetic ones. Clip off pills with a scissors or razor.

**Snagged Insulated Jacket**—put a halt to losing your insulation! Purchase a repair kit at a sporting goods store that specializes in down apparel. A fabric patch should be applied according to the directions.

**Hem Fall Out**—try to duplicate the original hem but if you haven't the skill nor patience use a narrow piece of fusible web (Polyweb or Stitch Witchery) and press with iron according to directions.

**Small tear** such as a three-corner tear in a shirt can be repaired by using a fusible interfacing (Armo's Fuse-a-Knit). This interfacing is sold by the yard and comes in a limited

number of colors. Fusible patches are also available in small packages. If the patch corners are square, remember to round them to prevent peeling off. Iron on these patches from the back side to minimize scars.

**Sew-on-a-button.** Use regular thread, double strand and knot. If the button to be replaced is large, use a match stick to form a shank; if the button is small like a shirt button, use a straight pin. Position the button to line up with the buttonhole. Start from the back through the fabric face and button, sew through completely once, then put the match stick or pin between the button and thread, continue sewing. Pull the match stick out, pull button up to form the shank. Wrap the shank securely with the thread. Pull the thread to the wrong side and secure.

## Summary

Teenagers' interest in clothing is related to a desire to look like and be accepted by their peers. The teenage years are a transition from child to adulthood and a period when they should be assuming increased responsibility for their appearance and clothing. Adults serve as role models for many clothing practices; showing is more effective than telling.

The amount spent for clothing increases dramatically from grade to junior high school. Girls spend more for clothing than boys; clothing expenditures peak between the ages of 16-24 years. Half of the clothing dollars are spent on outerwear; the remaining half purchases shoes, wraps, underwear and hosiery.

Managing the teenage wardrobe starts with cleaning out the closet and establishing what is wearable. Clothes purchases should reflect an individual's lifestyle; with careful planning wardrobes can be coordinated for maximum wear. Shopping sales, alternative retail outlets and second owner sources can extend the clothing budget. Teenagers need to realize the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of payment.

Use, storage and proper clothes care will increase the clothes mileage. Teenagers should learn these responsibilities at home as parents are readily available to teach practical skills.

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