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Four frugal ways to get rid of your stuff on the cheap

Between buying packing supplies and picking a moving van or hiring movers for long-distance hauls, moving costs can quickly add up.

Here are a few tips from Leah Ingram, who writes the Suddenly Frugal blog and is the author of "Toss, Keep, Sell: The Suddenly Frugal Guide to Cleaning Out the Clutter and Cashing In," for keeping costs low:

When in doubt, throw it out: Got a bunch of old clothes you never wear, books you finished a long time ago and knickknacks that have seen better days? Don't bring it with you.

"In 2007, we ended up selling our old house, and before we moved, we sold a bunch of our stuff on Craigslist," says Ingram. "We did that not only to get extra cash in our pocket, but if you have less stuff, then you spend less if you have to move. If you can get rid of 10 percent of your stuff, you could maybe save 10 percent on your moving cost."

Don't go with full-service movers: "If you can't afford a mover, find some college students you can pay to lift the heavy stuff," she advises. "One of the ways that we found to be the most efficient as far as saving time and money in moving is using one of those pods."

The pod system's flexibility made the move less harried and stressful. "We could fill the pod at our leisure after work every day or on the weekends. When the pod got to our new house, we could empty it at our leisure." At \$1,000 for a full house, "that was very affordable for us."

Rent or recycle supplies: Buying boxes from the office supply companies quickly adds up. A three-bedroom Household Kit from U-Haul will run you \$380.

Ingram recommends trying a Freecycle Listserv. "Freecyclers don't like to throw things out," she said. "And after I moved, I gave away my moving boxes and all of my bubble wrap and packing peanuts to people via Freecycle because I didn't want to throw it out and figured someone else could use it."

If you don't want to buy boxes, Ingram said they can be rented, which saves more money. "You pay for the boxes, you move and when you return them you get most of your money back." RentTheBox.com, in Atlanta, offers free drop-off and pick-up and says its reusable plastic totes have a lower environmental impact than cardboard boxes.

Plan your meals: Pit stops at fast-food joints add up quickly, especially for a larger family. "I would recommend planning ahead of time how you are going to eat during the move, if it means keeping a cooler in your car stacked with fresh fruit or cheese sticks, or sandwich-making supplies so you can feed yourself if you have to."

Have fun and save on birthday parties

Children's birthday parties have become major events. Forget the simple cake, ice cream and play-in-the-backyard variety. It's not uncommon these days to have large inflatable structures, flower arrangements, spa treatments, petting zoos and professional photographers.

Here are a few tips to tone it down:

1. Ask your child what she wants. Maybe give her a few choices.
2. Know your budget before you make your shopping list
3. Keep the invitation list manageable.
4. Host the party at home. No venue rental fee!
5. Pick a party time when you don't have to serve a full meal - maybe mid-morning or mid-afternoon, and just do cake and ice cream. Don't buy a cake; make your own. If it has frosting and sprinkles, the kids will love it.
6. No more goodie bags. Really, what parent wants a bunch of trinkets coming home?



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Here are some fun, inexpensive birthday party ideas:

Camp out: Make the invitations from cardboard. Create a quaint campsite using canvas and colorful paper and throw in a few sleeping bags, s'mores and hot dogs. Lots of kid fun!

Princess: Recruit a few teenage girls to dress up in prom gowns. Offer the guests spa services with pedicures and makeup. Eat pink cupcakes and drink pink punch.

Older kids: Find a local community service project. Reward their good deed with a nice meal afterward.

Use a pro/con list to help with tough choices

Some folks find making decisions easy. Should I have this or that? No problem, I'll choose this. Should I marry this person or that person? Easy peasy, I'll pick that person. Should I become a neurosurgeon or a professional butler?

Others find decision-making agonizing and stressful, painful even. Many make decisions by refusing to make decisions.

Many people opt to use the handy and ever helpful pro and con list. But are these lists really valuable?

"Just like looking both ways before crossing the street, we should consider the pros and cons before making important decisions," says Kamy Akhavan, the president of [ProCon.org](#), a nonprofit that promotes critical thinking in a pro-con format.

"Really understanding other perspectives, whether we agree with them or not, makes us more informed, better citizens and more advanced critical thinkers."

How should you approach a pro and con list? With complete honesty and bare-boned facts:

Compare apples to apples: If comparing a new job offer and looking at the commute, for example, be sure to list accurate information, from the distance to the type of road traveled, like highway or back roads, and how much gas would be needed each week.

Don't forget the details: Be very specific in your list. Don't just write "gas roughly \$50 a week." Instead, drive the distance and do the math. Be as accurate as you can. Sometimes a decision is made on the smallest of details.

Be honest: Don't gloss over facts because your heart is leaning one way or the other. Be honest with yourself, even if that means listing more negatives than you had originally realized. Same with positives. At first blush you may hate something and then with honest assessment realize there are some good points here and there.

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