

The Secondhand Revolution

Thanks to a wave of resale websites, it's easier than ever to shop for used goods and sell your hand-me-downs. Your wallet—and our planet—will be happier for it.

by **CHANTAL LAMERS** / photographs by **PAUL THORBURN**

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SO OFTEN, IT FEELS as if the most earth-friendly choice is also the most expensive (looking at you, organic berries). But when it comes to shopping for clothing and home goods, the greener way is the cheaper way. A surge of “recommerce” sites makes resale shopping—aka buying secondhand stuff—a realistic option for parents who want the best for less money.

Garment manufacturing is unfortunately one of the most resource-intensive industries, according to the United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion. It generates 20 percent of the world's wastewater annually, including the release of half a million tons of synthetic microfibers into the ocean. Thrifting cuts down on that pollution, and it creates demand for used goods that might otherwise go to landfills.

Participating in the resale market is actually good for your family's well-being, says Michael I. Norton, Ph.D., Harvard Business School professor and coauthor of *Happy Money: The Science of Happier Spending*. You are charitable when your money goes to another family. “It's an exchange relationship; we're building community,” he says. As for safety, Ari Brown, M.D., a *Parents* advisor, says laundering used clothes in hot water keeps germs at bay. Wipe any hard-surface goods with disinfectant. Let's get you started!



ALL THE COOL KIDS ARE THRIFTING!

**KNOW WHAT YOU NEED.**

Before shopping online, Camila Montanhani, a mom in Westchester County, New York, and a professional photographer, conducts a seasonal edit of her family's wardrobe. She sorts clothing into keep, donate, or repair piles. Then she creates a detailed list of what each family member needs, which helps her stay on budget and purchase only essentials. **BE DISCERNING.** As you browse online, review images and descriptions carefully. If an item's condition is unclear (is that zipper working?), don't hesitate to ask the seller questions. Verify recalls (even pajamas can qualify) by checking the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at cpsc.gov.

COUNT ON QUALITY! Bea Johnson, author of *Zero Waste Home*, suggests adopting a quality-over-quantity approach. Purchasing well-made goods made of natural materials generally translates to items that endure or that can be easily repaired. For clothing, Johnson suggests cotton, cashmere, silk, wool, and leather over synthetic materials whenever possible. **SNAG HIGH-END BRANDS ON DEEP DISCOUNT.** Seek out labels you love and trust, but include brands you may have previously considered too expensive in your searches too. "I've bought my daughter Bonpoint blouses—they retail for over \$100—for much less at a local consignment shop," says Elizabeth Morris, a mom

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**WHAT NOT
TO BUY
SECONDHAND**

Short answer: **car seats, cribs, and mattresses.** It's crucial to know a car seat's full history, so avoid buying one from a stranger. It's up to you whether to accept one from a trusted source, like your sister: Just know that a single minor accident can render a car seat unsafe. Also, the technology improves almost every year, so the newest car seats really are the best. Likewise, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission advises parents not to use a crib that's more than ten years old or one that's been modified or broken by its previous owners. Finally, mattresses are too hard to clean. When accepting used baby gear, check cpsc.gov to verify that the make and model haven't been recalled. And yes, the beloved Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleeper has been irrevocably recalled and you should not buy it, no matter what other parents say.

of two in Chicago, who spends an average of \$5 to \$10 per item. "And I got an REI snowsuit for my son to wear when he's bigger. It's hard to justify buying something expensive for a child even if you know it's high quality. Buying secondhand is a way to have high-end things at mass-market prices."

THINK AHEAD. Snow pants are a perfect example: By looking year-round, Morris consistently scores deals. "I don't think I've ever had to spend more than \$10 on a like-new pair of L.L.Bean snow pants," she says.

PUSH YOUR WISH LIST INTO THE FUTURE. Play a long game, particularly when you're on the hunt for something specific. Montanhani is proof that persistence pays off. For a long time, she searched weekly for a winter coat for her daughter before finally scoring a Patagonia puffer coat from a friend.

SEEK OUT IRONCLAD GUARANTEES. Stretch your dollar further by purchasing well-crafted goods from brands that offer lifetime warranties on products, says Johnson. Check out Totes, JanSport, Lands' End, and The North Face.

SELL IT RIGHT BACK. Larkin Gayl, who shares tips for sustainable living at @unfetteredhome on Instagram and in her "Zero-Waste Moms" Facebook group, shops for used clothing on eBay, Poshmark, and Craigslist, and when her family is done with those garments, she turns around and resells them on the same platforms. "Doing things this way scratches my consumer itch to have cute, new things without robbing the planet of more resources," says the

mom from Sebastopol, California. "Plus, it's so much cheaper than buying new." **FIND THE BARELY WORN STUFF.** Formal wear and clothes for a short life stage, such as wedding dresses, maternity clothes, and baby clothes, are great to purchase secondhand since they're worn for only a small bit of time, says Gayl. Similarly, limited-use items like rain jackets, snow boots, and

costumes often get outgrown before they are worn out. **GET STEALS WHEN YOU'RE PREGNANT.** Emily Marcogliese, a mom of one in Oakland, California, works for the resale site thredUP and grew especially passionate about the service during her pregnancy, when buying gently worn items afforded her a much bigger wardrobe than if she had purchased clothing

from traditional maternity shops. "And as my size has evolved postpregnancy, buying secondhand has kept me feeling less guilty about shopping than if I were trying to restock my closet with all new clothes." **SEARCH NEAR—AND FAR.** Neighborhood sites such as Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, and Nextdoor make it easy to search your neighborhood for deals. But

when Brianna Heiligenthal, the mom behind Instagram's @BurtsBrisPlease, was unable to find a trio of antique sleigh beds for her boys near her home in Hopkins, Minnesota, she cast a wider net. Two turned up in North Carolina and a third in Florida. She had them delivered via Roadie, an app that pays road trippers to pick up and deliver goods along their routes. A win for everyone involved!

9 Secondhand Sites We Love

1 **Facebook Marketplace (facebook.com/marketplace)** makes it convenient to shop your neighbor's castoffs, from antique furniture to strollers, bikes, camping gear, and more. Dana Dore, the blogger behind Adored House, in Farmingdale, New Jersey, says she prefers Facebook because she can check out the person's profile and how they're rated as a buyer and/or seller. "There's just something about being able to put a face to the name," says Dore. And that high-tech Facebook algorithm works in your favor, adds Brianna Heiligenthal. "I search for Toy Story-themed toys so often that now they pop up at the top of my feed," she says.

2 **Chairish (chairish.com)** offers an eclectic, well-curated collection of secondhand furnishings, searchable by style (mid-century, contemporary, boho chic) and easily sorted by category. There's no kid-dedicated filter, but don't let that be a deterrent. Go to chairish.com/style/childrens to find things like mini-me rattan chairs as well as vintage bentwood rockers, old schoolhouse desks, and brass unicorn bookends.

3 **Etsy (etsy.com)** is not just for crafts: Estate-sale and flea-market shoppers post treasure troves of vintage finds that they're looking to flip. Search for vintage books, wooden blocks, metal trucks, doll cribs, and mini enamel pots and pans. Unearth unique clothing for kids, such as overalls, fisherman sweaters, and smocked dresses, plus décor like paint-by-number art, wool Pendleton blankets, and pendants.

4 **Depop (depop.com)** is an app for the generation raised on Instagram, making it easy for teens and adults to flip through thrift offerings on a cell phone. Track items for sale by size and brand. Depop also serves up emerging designers selling original looks, so it's possible to find something that no one else has. Free; iOS and Android

5 **reCrib (recrib.com)** also offers noncrib items such as high chairs, jogging strollers, and gliders without the usual eye-popping price tags. This site allows parents to search by category, brand, model, and color within their zip code. There's even an option to arrange for a delivery via TaskRabbit, and the site offers a return policy.

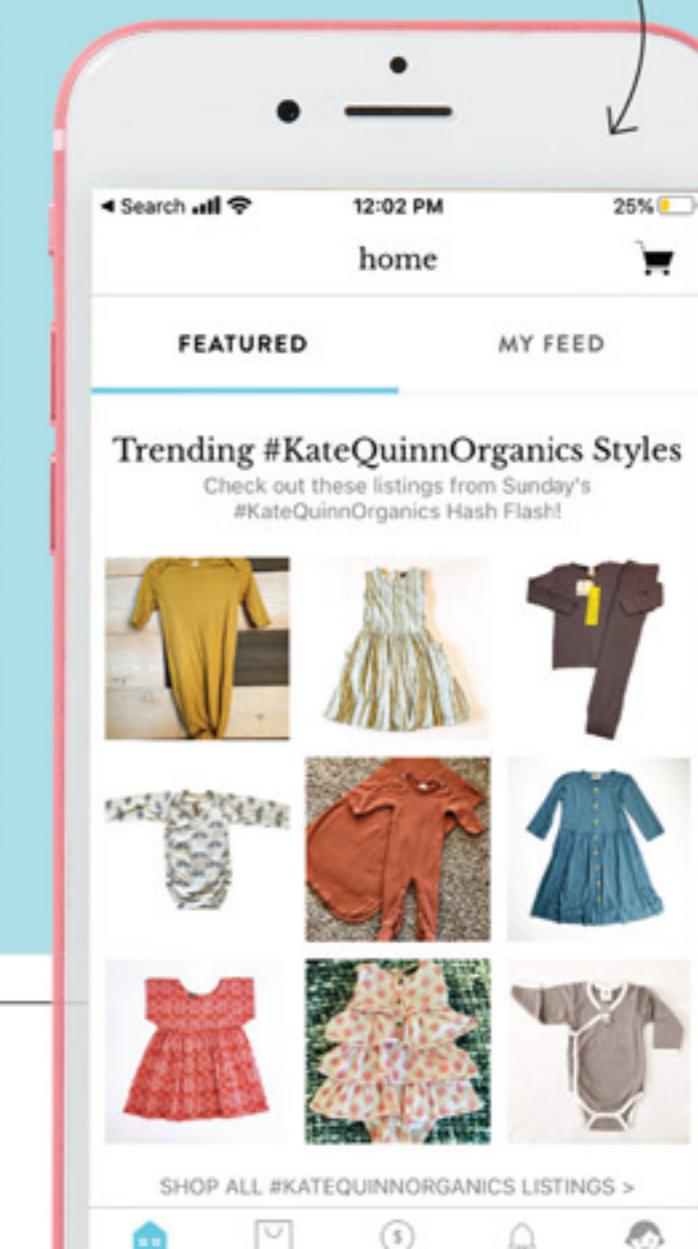
6 **Kidizen (kidizen.com)** is a parent-to-parent app offering everything from women's and children's clothing and accessories to décor, toys, books, and

baby gear, such as diaper bags and bibs. Search by size and brand, and by condition, too, ranging from "new with tags" to "play condition." The maternity department includes such short-term essentials as pumping and nursing bras. Free; iOS and Android

7 **Motherhood Closet (motherhoodcloset.com)** invites expecting mothers to shop by style and designer. Or choose a grab bag for \$125 with ten items selected based on a list of criteria. Final option: Get a rental membership (\$150 for one month, \$450 for all nine months) that gets you 15 gently used items at a time and unlimited swapping. Later you can consign maternity clothes here.

8 **thredUP (thredup.com)** is a one-stop shop for clothing, ranging from basic to high-end brands, and including maternity and kids' clothes. thredUP also offers gently used accessories including shoes, belts, backpacks, handbags, and sunglasses. Save time by setting filters for preferred sizes and brands, with an option to receive email notifications when new matches are added. Baby outfits start around \$3, and a pair of kids' shoes can be just \$5. Returns accepted within 14 days of delivery.

9 **Poshmark (poshmark.com)** has some 25 million items, ranging from household goods and art to clothing and pet supplies. Like eBay, Poshmark is consumer to consumer, so you'll need to sort through the user-generated photos. The site verifies luxury brands, like Chanel, for authenticity.



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