

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

Overview

Host or participate in a swap for toys, clothes, books, or tools. Reflect on how sharing items reduces waste, builds community, and encourages sustainable habits.

Learning outcomes

- Understand how swapping can reduce waste and consumption, while increasing connection and wellbeing.
- Reflect on community building through sharing.
- Explore alternatives to buying new items.

Proof to submit

Photos or short videos* of a swap event or student reflections about their experience

** Important: Please ensure that any videos submitted as proof do not include student names or clearly identifiable faces.*

Curriculum Connections

- Social Studies / Civics: Community building, cooperation, responsible consumption
- Mathematics: Counting, sorting, organizing or analyzing items or participation
- Health & Physical Education: Wellbeing, relationships, community connection
- Science: Waste reduction, resource use, environmental impacts

Materials

- Items brought from home to swap (e.g., clothes, toys, books, tools, etc.)
- Optional: posters or invitations to advertise the event

Activity

Grades K to 6

Students each bring one item from home to contribute to a classroom swap. They exchange items and take home something “new to them”. As a class, discuss why swapping is good for the planet and how it builds community. Students then reflect on how it feels to receive a new-to-them item and to see a classmate enjoy something they shared.

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

Grades 7 to 12

Students organize or take part in a classroom or school-wide swap. Each student contributes at least one item from home and reflects on how sharing changes the way people think about value, consumption, and community. The swap can optionally focus on a single type of item, such as clothing. Accessibility: For students unable or unwilling to bring items, allow them to submit a “what I would swap and why” reflection.

Accessibility: Students should not need to bring an item from home in order to participate. Some students may not have an appropriate item to swap, may be unable to bring something to school, or may not wish to part with their belongings.

Alternative ways to participate could include:

- Helping organize, advertise, or set up the swap.
- Helping sort and display items.
- Creating signs or invitations for the event.
- Submitting a “What I would swap and why” reflection.
- Participating in the discussion and reflecting on the benefits and challenges of sharing.

Tip: If hosting a school-wide swap, plan ahead for what to do with leftover items, such as donating them locally.

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

Resources for teachers

Visit the [Live Net Zero Classroom Challenge website](#) for additional resources and information.

Step by Step: Hosting a Stuff Swap

Whether it's a garden hose or a toddler bike, chances are there's plenty of useful "stuff" sitting neglected within your community. Help people get access to pre-owned items – and give idle stuff a second life – by setting up community swaps and marketplaces where you can share and trade goods in a fun, co-operative, and often low-cost setting.

What is a stuff swap?

Very simply, a stuff swap involves getting a bunch of people together to exchange toys, clothes, books, tools, or household goods they no longer use or need, in order to keep the items "circulating" longer. Stuff swaps provide a fun way to get community members swapping gently used items in an organized setting.

But these events aren't just about recycling – they're about making connections, meeting new people in your community, and sometimes even philanthropy. Smaller stuff swaps typically attract around 10–30 people, but you can aim much bigger depending on your intentions, resources, and volunteer support.

Key Steps

Step 1: When, where & why? What's your purpose?

Maybe it's about getting people together for spring cleaning. Maybe it's about meeting new people in the community. Or maybe there's a larger goal, like raising funds for a local charity. Whatever the motivation, identify a larger purpose for your swap to give it significance. Then, set a date that gives people (and yourself!) enough time to plan the event and gather items. Also, consider the type of venue – will it be at a community space or rental site, a school, a home, a friend's café or business?

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

Step 2: Spread the word.

Get people to sort through their garages, closets, and drawers for gently used (no damage or stains) toys, clothes, books, tools, or household goods. Let participants know early on if their sorting and recycling is going to support a cause, as this may provide extra motivation for people to part with nicer items.

Step 3: Plan the event.

Most stuff swaps last for about two hours, but the timing really depends on the number of participants: more people means more stuff and more time needed to browse and sample! Also, think about the size of the space you'll need (including possible fitting rooms for clothing) and the amount of time it will take to sort items pre-swap. If it's a large event, consider asking people to drop off items in advance, and then sign up volunteers to help sort and size items and create signage. And of course, leave time for cleanup.

Step 4: Allocate any needed tasks among a small committee.

Think about any props, food, and drinks you may want on hand. For a large event, make sure the swap site has washroom facilities and possibly even a kitchen. Consider having mirrors (or even changing tents) available, tables to use for sorting and display, and food and drink. You could organize the event to be a potluck, or maybe you can get a local restaurant or café to donate some treats, especially if it's a community event to raise money for charity.

Step 5: Establish any ground rules or suggestions for attendees.

Maybe it's a suggested donation, with the money going to a local cause or group, or maybe it's a "bring a bag, take a bag" policy. Also, offer a friendly reminder for people to be considerate and not to hoard items, to ensure that the swap is as rewarding as possible.

Step 6: Day of event.

Have a friend or two help you set up the room, or, if you've asked people to drop off items in advance, remind volunteers to arrive a half hour to an hour before the event to help sort and arrange items (you can also ask participants to self-sort items as they bring them). If the event involves refreshments, consider sharing these before the swap begins to avoid spilling food and drink on clothing and other items.

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

Step 7: Create a welcome and introduction.

Think about preparing a fun introduction as a way to welcome attendees to the event, to describe your cause, and to enable new people to introduce themselves to one another. Maybe they don't all know what a stuff swap is about, or maybe they want to learn more about the group(s) you're supporting locally.

Step 8: Plant the seed for more swaps or group activities to happen in the future.

Host conversations about what cause the next swap should support locally, or how it could be organized next time. If some of the participants really "click," consider how you can facilitate future meetings and group actions. Also, be sure to take photos as a way to showcase the event and motivate others to participate in the future.

Step 9: Do a final recycle.

Take any unclaimed items to a donation site, such as a community-based nonprofit, charity shop, or shelter that accepts second-hand items.

Step 10: Share your success!

Contact your local papers in advance of the swap to see if they might be interested in doing a story on the event. If not, consider writing a letter to the editor or contributing a guest blog sharing how the swap went. Or, describe your event at a future community gathering to plant more seeds for creative recycling, sharing, and swapping!

Things to consider when organizing a stuff swap:

- Stuff swaps are different for everyone, and there are diverse options to fit your occasion and purpose.
- No money is exchanged at a swap! It's either free or you can collect a small donation for a select charity or group. In exchange for new "treasures," most people are happy to donate to support a social or environmental need in the community, or to bring a dish to share at a swap/potluck event.
- You'll need to decide whether or not to set limits on the amount of swapping: will you impose a "bring a bag, take a bag" rule, or just let folks bring and take what they need?
- Encourage ongoing recycling! If there is "stuff" left over, or if folks bring home things that don't fit or they don't like, consider donating the items to a thrift store or bringing them to another swap.

Stuff Swap

Take-home challenge!

"In a shareable world, things like car sharing, clothing swaps, childcare co-ops, potlucks, and cohousing make life more fun, green, and affordable. When we share, not only is a better life possible, but so is a better world."

—Shareable.net

Acknowledgments: This step-by-step guide was adapted by OneEarth Living based on the New Dream Community Action Kit — Guide to Sharing, produced by the Center for a New American Dream in partnership with Shareable, a nonprofit online magazine that tells the story of sharing. The original text was written by Lisa Mastny, Wendy Philleo, and Wen Lee, with additional support from Neal Gorenflo.