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Kay Sarlin/Abigail Lootens/Gabrielle Miller (DCA), (212) 487-4283

## **DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS PROVIDES NEW YORKERS WITH PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SMART BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING**

### ***Parents Can Learn Additional Ways to Protect Their Money With Free, One-on-One Professional Financial Counseling at the City's Network of Financial Empowerment Centers***

With the new school year rapidly approaching, Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Jonathan Mintz has issued "protect your money" pointers for families shopping for their kids' back-to-school needs.

"Back-to-school spending is becoming increasingly costly," said Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "It's important for families to keep these money-saving tips in mind to make the most of their hard-earned dollars, and in turn teach their kids to be savvy shoppers."

Commissioner Mintz issued the following tips to help parents manage their finances throughout the back-to-school shopping season and turn back-to-school shopping into an opportunity to teach their children smart money management:

### **QUICK LESSONS FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING**

- **Receipts for beginners.** Ask for a receipt and save it. In New York City, you are entitled to a receipt for purchases of more than \$20. Protect your personal information—by law, a customer's receipt must not show the credit card's expiration date or more than its last five digits.
- **Credit card curriculum.** If you pay for back-to-school purchases with a credit card, read the fine print, know your credit limit and pay your balance in full. If you exceed your credit limit or pay late, some interest rates can skyrocket to 30 percent or higher.
- **Refund refresher.** Shopping for back-to-school supplies? Check store refund policies. Stores must post a sign detailing their policy. If they don't, you are entitled to a refund within 30 days of your purchase.
- **Crash course in electronics.** Many electronics stores charge a "restocking" fee for items returned in an opened box. The fee, which can vary, must be disclosed in the store's refund policy.

### **TEACHING YOUR KIDS TO SAVE WHILE THEY SPEND**

- **Budget or bust.** Creating a budget and sticking to it is essential. Teach your children to recognize how their "needs" and "wants" may differ. Tell them about the tough choices you sometimes make to stick to your budget. Show your children how to spend responsibly and include them in spending decisions that affect the whole family. If your kids have a job or earn an allowance, teach them how to budget this money through a spending and savings plan. This will help them make better financial decisions in the

future.

- **Start saving.** Saving is important, even in small amounts. Save a little each month and eventually you will have a large sum. Explain to your children why they should put money into savings first, for a “rainy day,” before spending it. Though they may want something now, they will probably need something later. If your children do not have savings accounts, bring them to a bank or credit union to open one and to make deposits to it, forming a smart habit at a young age.
- **Credit card 101.** Teach your children about credit and how it works. Explain to them that a credit card is not “free money” and that charges must be paid back with interest. Tell them about the consequences of using a credit card irresponsibly.
- **Compare prices to save.** Help your children recognize the importance of reducing expenses whenever possible by including them in shopping or coupon-cutting. Take them along to buy school supplies or to the grocery store and ask for their help in finding the best deal on a certain item through comparison shopping. You can even let older children try to do the shopping on their own while staying within a given budget.
- **Lead by example.** Show your children how to make smart financial choices. Kids learn a great deal by observing their parents.

Parents can download a copy of these tips at [nyc.gov/consumers](https://nyc.gov/consumers) or request copies of Back-to-School Shopping Tips and Smart Money Lessons for Your Kids by calling 311.

## FINANCIAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Buying back-to-school supplies can put a strain on working families and their budgets, but now it's easier than ever for parents to get help with their finances. New Yorkers can access free, one-on-one financial counseling at one of the City's 18 Financial Empowerment Centers, administered by DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE). At a time when New Yorkers are finding it harder than ever to make ends meet, the professional financial counselors at the City's Financial Empowerment Centers can help with money management, budgeting, financial planning, credit counseling, negotiating with creditors, responding to debt collectors, identity theft, finding affordable banking services, government benefit screenings and referrals to other services and organizations. Counseling services are offered in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Call 311 and ask for an NYC Financial Empowerment Center. Visit [nyc.gov/ProtectYourMoney](https://nyc.gov/ProtectYourMoney) for the Top 10 Ways to Protect Your Money.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law and other related business laws throughout New York City. Ensuring a fair and vibrant marketplace for consumers and businesses, DCA licenses more than 71,000 businesses in 55 different industries. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses alike about their rights and responsibilities. DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) is the first local government initiative in the nation with a mission to educate, empower, and protect New Yorkers with low incomes so they can build assets and make the most of their financial resources. Toward that end, OFE seeks to increase access to high-quality, low-cost financial education and counseling; improve access to income-boosting tax credits; connect households to safe and affordable banking and asset-building products and services; and enforce and improve consumer protections to enhance financial stability. The City's free Financial Empowerment Centers can help

you take control of your debt, improve your credit, deal with debt collection, create a budget, open a bank account, and much more. One-on-one financial counseling is provided for free by professional counselors in person or by phone in English, Spanish, and Chinese. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA online at [nyc.gov/consumers](https://nyc.gov/consumers).