

# Clothes Swap

**To do list:** (see details below)

- Find a site
- Choose a day and hours
- Set policies
- Advertise
- Find charities to take leftover clothes at the end of the day
- Find volunteers for set up, bagging at the end of the day, and to help during the swap. Volunteers can also help advertise.
- Obtain supplies
- Make signs (for tables, roadside, directional signs for walls in building)
- Collect clothing to start the swap
- Plan “to do” lists for the morning and the end of the swap

## Find a site

- Consider churches, schools, or community centers that are likely to have a large room and at least 35 tables to 45 tables. 43 to 45 tables and a few racks for hanging items should work well.
- Consider a site that will have adequate parking and easy access for loading and unloading, and that is likely to carry broad insurance that will cover all activities held there (e.g., schools, churches).
- Churches may be less available on weekends due to weddings and church services.

## Choose a day and hours

- Saturday is best, as more people can attend, and late hours won't be needed. If a weekday, try to run the swap until 7 p.m. so that working people can attend.
- Start time is generally around 10 a.m.

## Set policies

- Generally, no one is required to bring or take anything in order to participate. It

serves the community best if there is no obligation either way, as people who have nothing will feel welcome to participate. Freecycle lists won't allow posts advertising the swap unless everything is free and there is no obligation to "swap."

- Depending on your area, you may want to set and post a policy of "no dealers, no resale," and include that in advertising.
- You may also want to consider a policy of "no charities, no organizations during swap hours," to ensure that the swap is dedicated to individuals within the community. Charities and organizations may contact you and arrange to come at the end of the swap to take what they need.
- It's easier for families to participate if they can bring strollers or wheeled containers. Find out if your host site allows this, as people will ask.
- Decide what you will allow at the swap. Most people will bring things other than clothes, like baby-related items, toys, books, accessories, shoes, and even fabric.
- Set a policy that clothing must be clean and in good condition, and decide how to handle clothing that's stained, torn, or dirty. Some people will be offended by clothing that doesn't meet criteria, but others will view it as a find. Some people are skilled at removing spots or repairing broken zippers. Those who need play or work clothes may not mind stains or tears. You can set a separate table for these items or just leave them with the rest of the clothing of that size.
- Check local ordinances and include policies, as appropriate.

## **Advertise**

- Advertise on Freecycle and Freeshare lists. As a courtesy, you may want to contact moderators first to ask if you can post the swap. The word "swap" implies trading, which isn't allowed in Freecycle, so clarify for the moderator why it's called a "swap." Calling it a FREE Clothing Exchange in the subject line may help. Some moderators will allow one WANTED post, and another OFFER post a week later.
- Contact all area churches a week or two before the swap, and provide written info for their bulletin or announcements. Most churches have a cut-off date of Monday or Tuesday morning for the following Sunday's bulletin.
- Contact local newspapers. Ask them to include your swap in their community event listings; suggest an article. Consider writing a press release to submit to newspapers, or contacting local TV or radio stations.
- Make and post flyers in grocery stores and other buildings that have public bulletin boards.
- If there are garage sales in your area prior to the swap, visit and leave a flyer in case they would like to drop off their unsold clothes at the swap. Depending on resources, you may offer to pick up.

- Contact school social workers, local social help groups (Catholic Social Services, Lutheran Social Services, etc.), so they can tell those in need about the swap.
- Depending on your budget, make and distribute flyers in local neighborhoods.
- Ask people to spread the news by word-of-mouth.

### **Find charities to take leftover clothes at the end of the day**

- It's best to call charities vs. email. Look for children's groups to take the kids clothes, and adult shelters to take the adult clothes. Google "homeless shelters" and check their websites to see if they will take clothing. Some will only take new T-shirts or any coats. Others will take all clothing. Try groups like Catholic or Lutheran Social Services. Let them know that the clothing will be sorted and bagged by size (and gender for adults and larger child sizes).
- Kids' clothes can also be sent on to the next swap in a neighboring area. Contact the organizer and ask if they would be interested.
- Decide what your goal is ... if it's to keep the clothes flowing freely in the community, ask charities what they will do with the clothes. Many charities sell clothing they take in to merchants who mulch and recycle the fibers.
- Ask charities to plan to pick up at the end of the swap. They should be prepared to help bag up the clothes they're taking. Depending on how many clothes you take in and how much goes out, you may need a few trucks to haul it all away. For the first swap, it's wise to plan for a way to temporarily store the clothing if pick up can't be completed at the end of the day. If resources are available, the clothing can be dropped off at the charity. Many homeless shelters do not have the resources to pick up donations.

### **Find volunteers**

- Volunteers can sort bagged clothing onto the correct tables for the start of the swap.
- Volunteers are needed throughout the day to answer questions, help find clothes, direct attendees to the correct tables, provide bags, straighten up tables, check sizes on tables / move clothes to the right tables, and monitor the event to keep things running smoothly and ensure that kids don't get into mischief. Volunteers can watch a play area if you set one up (table with crayons and paper, a mat with toys, a movie on DVD, etc.).
- Volunteers are needed at the end of the day to bag remaining clothes by size and gender, and to clean up the area.
- Volunteers can also help advertise by posting flyers, visiting garage sales or churches, posting on internet groups, etc.

## Obtain supplies

- Supplies for the first swap should cost approximately \$50. This figure can be reduced if you can find items at the dollar store, or for free, or if you can borrow or have them donated. Supplies for subsequent swaps will cost \$15 to \$30.

For the first swap, you'll need:

- o Outdoor sign. An old "House For Sale" sign can be covered with poster board. If it's a rainy day, plastic sign material may be needed, or get a For Sale sign that comes wrapped in plastic, slit the bottom, slip the poster board in, and tape the plastic opening securely. A clear plastic garbage bag also makes a good sign cover for a rainy day, but tape or tie the lower ends to secure it. A sturdy metal sign frame is available at home improvement stores for around \$15.00. You can fold a poster board sign 1/2" at the top and bottom, poke holes to correspond to the holes on the frame, and secure the poster board with twist ties. Check with the host site as they may have a sign frame available.
- o Indoor signs. Plan signs to direct the flow of traffic through the building to the swap site. Post policies such as "no dealers," if desired. Size signs are needed on each table. It's a good idea to post signs on both sides of the table, as people will walk back and forth during the swap. Get bright paper for the signs, and select one color for each size range to help people identify where one size stops and the next starts. Discount department stores sell packs of bright paper for as little as \$3.95. Some dollar stores carry small packs of paper. Two packages may be needed to put signs on both sides of the table, and to ensure enough bright yellow and orange paper for directional signs. Preserve the table signs for the duration of the swap (and for the next swap) by enclosing them in plastic sheet protectors. Packages of 25 are available at some dollar stores. If preferred, the signs can be packed with the clothes at the end of the swap. This may help the recipient to identify and sort the donation.
- o Tape gun and tape. Secure the signs to walls and tables with clear packaging tape to ensure they stay in place for the duration of the swap.
- o Spiral notebook or binder and sign in sheets. Set up a table at the swap entrance for people to sign up for the mailing list. Keeping a list will allow you to count how many people attend.
- o Miscellaneous office supplies: pens for the sign up notebook, markers to add to signs as needed, index cards or notepaper to tape size info to bags at the end of the swap. Stapler, if you prefer to staple the size info to the bags.
- o Garbage bags and boxes. People may not bring bags, or may underestimate how much they may take. Collect large plastic and paper shopping bags during the weeks before the swap. Boxes can be collected, but tend to take more space. Plan to have a few boxes of garbage bags

available to hand out as well. Discount stores sell 30 gallon .85 mil bags for a few dollars a box. Get a few boxes of heavier duty Force Flex type bags for bagging clothes at the end of the swap. The bags will hold more and will withstand transport to the charities. The red tie handles on the bag work well for stapling or taping size info. The number of bags needed at the end of the swap will depend on how many clothes you have left. It may be better to have too many bags on hand and save them for the next swap.

- o Bring a camera. Don't forget to take a few snapshots of the event for your records or to submit to a local paper for a story after the event.

### **Disclaimer**

- This document is only intended to serve as a guide. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have complied with all local laws and ordinances and obtained any and all necessary permits and/or licenses prior to setting up your own clothes swap. The author is not responsible any omissions or inaccuracies. Further, the author is not responsible for your ability to use or not use any information contained in this document.