

When Your Child Loses Things

“Riches do not exhilarate us so much with their possession as they torment us with their loss.”—Epicurus, Greek philosopher

Sometimes your child can seem like a black hole. You give your child a backpack, a jacket, a camera—and then it’s gone. Your child doesn’t know where it is (and sometimes blames everyone else for the disappearance). How can you teach your child to hang on to things? Consider these ideas.

Try it...

For all parents

- Losing things, unfortunately, is developmentally appropriate for kids. During some rapid times of growth, many kids have a hard time keeping track of themselves, let alone anything else. So know that you’re not the only family dealing with this issue.
- Decide which items you can turn over to your child completely and which ones you want to monitor more closely. Many parents keep closer track of higher-cost items, such as cameras and hand-held video games. With younger children, you can bring these out for them to use, and then put them away yourself. With older kids, you can create a place for them to keep these items (such as in a specific spot in their room or in another area of your house) to help them keep track of things.
- Be clear that your child is responsible for items that get stolen or lost. For example, some kids think if they blame a thief, their parents will more likely replace an item. Be up front that it’s up to them to replace an item. This often will help them keep better track of their things. Or if they figure out where they left the item, have them go pick it up.
- Teach your child responsibility by trying the ideas in the chapter on Asset 30: Responsibility in [What Young Children Need to Succeed](#) for ideas from birth to age 11 and in [What Kids Need to Succeed](#) for ideas for ages 12 to 18.
- Be empathetic when your child loses something valuable. You want your child to be responsible, but you also want your child to see you as a trusted adult who truly cares about his or her ups and downs.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Create a bag or backpack that you take with you on outings that have items your child enjoys. Keep those things in that bag when they’re not using them so that you know where these items are.
- If your child loses a favorite blanket, stuffed animal, or other item, search with your child. Even if you don’t find it, your child often feels less stressed if you’re just as

concerned about the lost item as he or she is.

- Be realistic about what this age can do in terms of responsibility.
- Keep family valuables far from young hands. Young children enjoy playing with keys, watches, remotes, purses, jewelry, and other items that you don't want lost. Keep these items high on a shelf or inside a container that kids cannot get into.
- Consider packing away some of your valuables until your children are older to keep them safe from getting lost, or broken. Or keep them in a display case that your child cannot open.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Make it easy for your child to keep track of items for school. For example, have a one-two-three count. One is for the backpack. Two is for the coat. And three is for the lunchbox (or another item).
- Write your child's first and last name with permanent marker inside of clothes, backpacks, and other important items. Most schools have a lost and found, and they're more likely to help you get these items back if your child's first and last name are printed inside.
- Create a place for your child's important things so that they begin to associate that place for certain items. For example, maybe you have a hook for your child's backpack and another for your child's coat. Maybe you find a small shelf that will hold your child's valuables.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- The onset of puberty can seem to rob your child of his or her sense of responsibility. Kids at this age seem to misplace everything. Many parents of this age talk about how they seem to have more items in their home that belongs to their kids' friends than to their own kids! If this happens to you, consider creating a box to keep other kids' stuff.
- Talk with your child about taking responsibility for keeping track of valuables, such as a cell phone, an mp3 player, or a digital camera. When you give these items to your child, give them fully to your child, which means that if your child loses them (or if the items are stolen), it's your child's loss, not yours.
- Teach your child to empty their pockets at the end of the day. Too many kids at this age leave valuables in their pockets, and then these items get ruined in the washer.
- If your child loses something valuable and cannot find it after a time, talk about how he or she can work to buy another one. Don't bail out your child, but create a work plan where your child earns all the money to buy a replacement. This won't be easy for you—or your child—but it teaches your child a valuable lesson about hanging on to things.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- At this age, your teenager may own some high-price items, which are not only easy to lose but are also tempting for others to steal. Consider listing these items as personal articles to your homeowner's insurance. There's often a small annual fee, but when these items are listed individually, they rarely have a deductible and will be fully reimbursed if your teen files a police report for stolen property.

- At this age, your teenager should be able to keep better track of things. Continue to build skills in areas where your teenager may be struggling, such as keeping track of a driver's license (by keeping it in a wallet instead of just a pocket) and homework assignments.
- Be open and flexible about how your teenager keeps track of things. Some are quite organized and systematic. Others are more right-brained and spontaneous. If your teenager is not organized, talk about other ways to keep track of things, such as having a decorative bowl to place things in or getting a night stand to hold a wallet, cell phone, and so on. Encourage creative ideas so that your teenager keeps track of what's important.