**How to save money on prom and still make your kid feel like a million bucks**

by Bethany Ramos

That event your teen has been dreaming of all year long is a night most parents don’t even want to think about. When you factor in all the bells and whistles that go into a memorable prom night, you just know you’re going to be looking at a hefty bill a few months later.

Not to play the Scrooge card on this one, but it’s really hard to get in the prom spirit with your teen when you know that every event add-on and extracurricular activity is going to cost you. Lest you think we’re exaggerating or have fallen too far on the penny-pinching side of the fence, we’re happy to break it down for you.

In the past decade alone, not long after the parents of this generation graduated high school, prom costs have moved from affordable to exorbitant. A prom in the ‘80s or ‘90s might have meant a corsage, a new dress and a sweet borrowed ride, if you were lucky. Today’s proms have become much more involved than a one-night-only affair (promposals, anyone?) with a heftier price tag to match. The annual Visa high school prom cost survey estimated that a promposal alone could run $324, with $919 spent on the average teenage prom-goer. This total is down 6 percent from the previous year, but still.

There’s got to be a way for teens to attend prom without blowing a grand.

Fortunately, there is. We’ve rounded up the prom industry experts, along with a few parents who are sick of these sky-high prom expenses, to put you on the right track:

1. The dress

There are several special organizations that have been created to support students who may not be able to afford to attend or even dress for prom, and Becca’s Closet is one of them. Through local chapters of Becca’s Closet, girls in financial need can get dresses, shoes and prom accessories for free.

For teens who are simply looking to cut costs (since some prom dresses can cost as much as a wedding gown), checking out a dress rental or exchange site can help to minimize expenses.

2. The flowers

Considering that a boutonniere or corsage could run you anywhere from $10-$25 each, this is the perfect time to teach your teen how to comparison shop. Trae Bodge, TV's "smart shopping expert" and mother of a tween, recommends calling around (or enlisting your teen to call) local florists to find the best prom flower deals. “A good thing to remember with corsages is that wrist corsages tend to be more expensive than pin-ons because they are more complex,” says Bodge.

You can also try your hand at making your own corsage for the total price of free.

3. The makeup

The best way to save money on the pre-prom beauty prep is by checking out the alternatives. “If you have a cosmetology school nearby (like Paul Mitchell), you can have your hair and makeup done by a student for a fraction of the price. Seniors have a lot of experience and can be very easy to work with,” says Kim Collins, style expert and SVP at PromGirl.com. Collins also recommends watching how-to YouTube videos for hair, makeup and nail inspiration — as long as your teen practices the look with a friend or family member a few times before the big day.

As for that sun-kissed glow that has now become illegal with the nationwide teen tan ban, Collins advises teens “use self-tanner at home and pass on expensive (and dangerous) tanning. Not only will your pockets thank you, so will your skin. Again, be sure to do a test run well before prom and make sure you find a tanner you love.

4. The tux

There’s a fork in the road when it comes to teen boy prom attire. Does your son want to go black tie or casual? If it’s a black-tie prom, then you will probably need to rent a tux for one night only, since it is unlikely to be used again. Comparison shopping and keeping a lookout for coupons at local tux rental shops is your best bet, says Bodge. If his prom style is more casual, purchasing a new and stylish suit may be a better choice since it can be worn on more than one occasion. Bodge recommends checking budget-friendly and teen-friendly stores like Macy’s or Forever 21 first.

5. The accessories

To put on the finishing touches, this is one time when it can literally pay to be thrifty. Start by checking out local garage sales and estate sales for unique and vintage finds, including costume jewelry. And if you don’t want to leave the house — and commit hours to hunting through the bargain bins — you can easily find what you’re looking for online. Search for trash-to-treasure trinkets and one-of-a-kind accessories on resale sites like Craigslist, Etsy and VarageSale. There are also plenty of easy tutorials for adorable DIY jewelry that your teen can wear again and again, like this upcycled (and expensive-looking) color block bracelet.

6. The transportation

Fresh and flashy prom transport may be one cost you can’t skimp on — since most teens won’t agree to pull up to prom in a minivan. But, but, there is a way to get around the steep prom limo price. “Instead of paying for a limo for several hours, take an Uber,” says Collins. “Limos often have at least a two- to four-hour minimum, which seems like a waste since you only need a car for the short trip to the event.”

7. The pictures

We’re living in an Instagrammed world, so you’d think taking prom pics would be a snap. (See what we did there?) Unfortunately, this is where most parents run into problems. As much time as they spend on Instagram and Snapchat, your teen may still want hard copy photos that they can frame and preserve for years to come. “These days, you can take beautiful photos on your cell phone, so there’s really no need to invest in the pricey photo package at the school or local photo studio,” says Bodge. “Volunteer your photographic skills or call in a favor with a friend or family member who takes pretty pictures. Then, visit a drugstore like CVS or Walgreens to create any number of fabulous photo keepsakes, like photo albums, canvases, mugs, posters — just about anything!”