

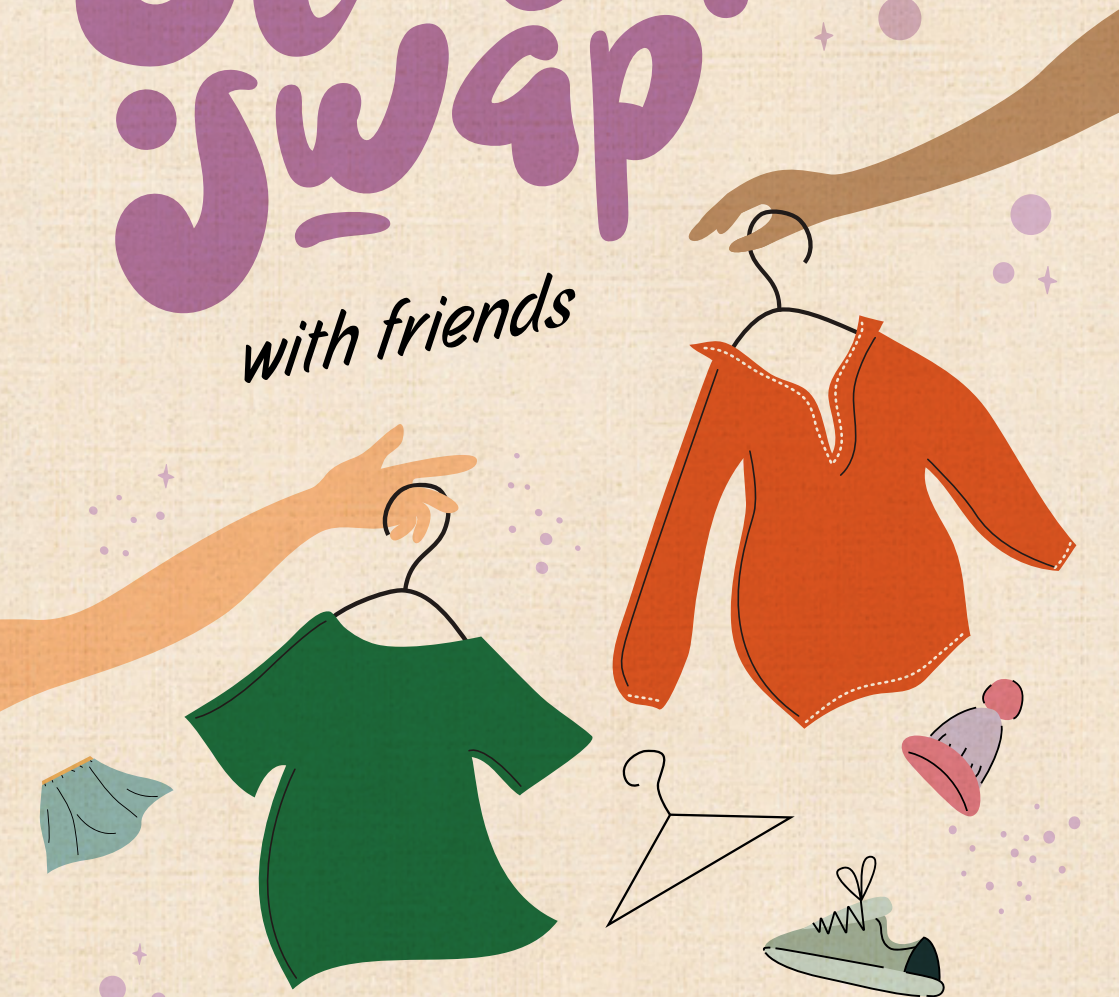
How to host a

clothes swap

with friends



Merri-bek
City Council



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Quotes, based on interviews with Merri-bek residents, have been shortened or paraphrased for brevity or clarity.



Produced by Merri-bek City Council
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Clothes Swaps

Where people get together to swap their good quality clothes – a fun and easy way to spend time with friends, save money and save the planet!



Why host a clothes swap?

If you have ever hosted any kind of party at your home then you already have all the skills and space you need to host a clothes swap party.

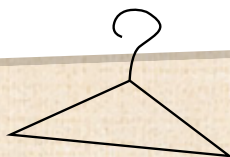
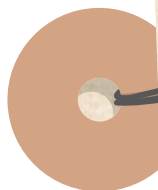
Clothes swaps are a great way to:

- update your wardrobe with new-to-you items;
- move on items you don't wear (guilt free!);
- cut down on buying new clothes - or buying at all;
- extend the life of special items and keep them out of landfill.



Mind the Gap!

Australians buy an average of **56** items of **new clothing** each year.¹ Comparing this to the recommended **six new items per year**⁹ reveals quite a big gap between reality and sustainability! Clothes swaps are a fun and simple way you and your friends can help to close that gap with new-to-you items.



Swap, don't shop!

Here is what some of our local Merri-bek clothes swappers had to say about their experiences:

“

Because I wasn't thinking about the cost, I really thought about the feel and how much I would wear things... all my clothes swap finds are my favourite clothes.

The first time I went to a clothes swap I was worried there wouldn't be anything in my size or my style, and that I might not have bought the right things, but I was so wrong!



Seeing my friends enjoy my old clothes was almost better than getting some cool new things for myself!

There are too many clothes in the world. Swapping is a great way to get more wear out of things.

I finally cleared some space in the wardrobe, and I bought home things I will actually wear instead.

We had a great time catching up and trying on each other's clothes, I loved the camaraderie of all the women supporting each other. I think that is my favourite thing about swaps.



Ways to run your swap

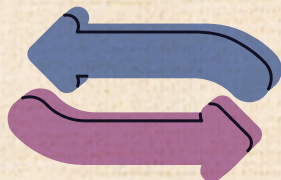
People generally run their clothes swaps using one of these two approaches:

1. Bring one - take one

Some people like to set a limit on the number of items guests can bring and then take away, for example 'bring five great pieces, take five great pieces'. This can be a good approach if space is limited or if you want to have a smaller event with fewer people and less chance of leftovers.

2. Free-for-all

Other swaps are run without limits on numbers. Guests can bring as many clothes as they want, or bring nothing at all. They can also take as many items as they want, or take nothing at all. This approach suits larger or more casual events.



Choose one of these approaches or set the rules that suit you and your friends best.

You decide how you want your event to run.

Getting ready

What you need:

You will need

- a bit of space to bring friends and family together – a lounge room, dining room, garage, yard or patio.

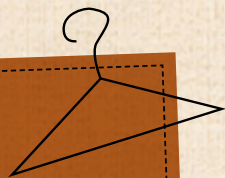
It's good to have

- clothes hangers;
- clothes racks;
- somewhere private for trying on clothes (a bedroom usually works); and
- a full length mirror.



If you don't have these things

Ask your guests to bring along hangers. You might be able to borrow what you don't already have such as racks, mirrors, or a privacy screen.



Who and when

- **Talk to friends and family** about a swap to work out the best time and place and what things you could borrow.
- **Ask a 'co-host'** to share the load and add to the fun.
- **Invite people you think would enjoy getting together** and might like each other's clothes.
- **Let them know what to expect.** A written invitation, email, text, group chat or Facebook event are all good methods for inviting people along.
- **Pick a good time.** Consider holding the swap when the seasons are changing and people might be thinking about going through their clothes.
- **Allow a few weekends** between the invitation and the event to leave time for people to go through their clothes.
- **Have a definite start and finish time** to help you manage the day. Allow between one and three hours. This will give people enough time to try on things, put them back and share recommendations with each other.



What to ask guests to bring

- **Bring good quality only:** Ask people to bring only clothes and accessories that they know someone else could proudly wear, love and use.
- **Bring snacks and drinks:** Invite people to bring some food or drinks to share. Flowers are another great thing to bring. These all add to the party atmosphere and are a great way to warm up and get conversations flowing before the swapping starts.
- **What to do with the leftovers:** At the end of your swap there will likely be leftover items. The clothes need to be in good, clean condition, and able to be sold by a local charity store.

Trash or treasure?

The average Australian only wears **40 per cent** of their clothes¹⁰, and most items only get worn about **7 times**.⁶ Clothes swaps are a great way to unlock and share all our hidden clothing treasures and make sure they get more wear.

Example invitation

You're invited

Swap 'til you drop clothes swap party



2pm - 5pm Sunday, 23 May
My place! 123 Name of Street, Suburb

What to bring

Your good quality clothes that you no longer reach for but know someone else could love - it can be one thing or 20 things; there's no limit! (If you have spare hangers, please bring those too.)

Bring along a plate of something to share before we get started.

Good to know

Anything left over will be donated to charity of choice. There will be places to try on clothes in private. Children and pets are welcome!

RSVP 20 May to emailme@mail.com.au

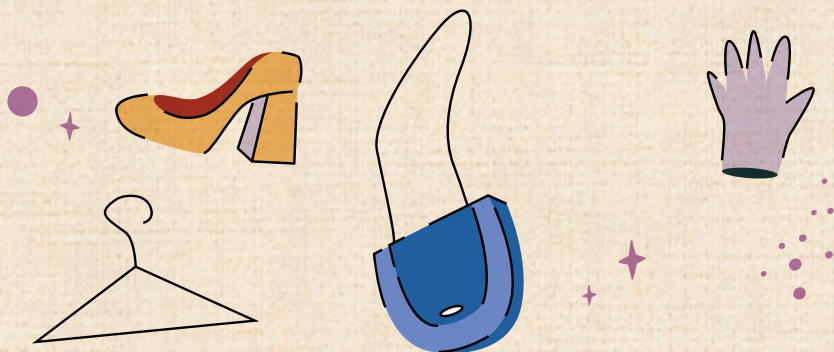
What happens on the day

Set up your space:

- **Clear some room:** If you need to, move small furniture out of the way to make room for portable clothes racks and space to walk around to look at the clothes.
- **Hang it up:** Consider using curtain rods, door frames, clothes drying racks or wall hooks to hang outfits instead of, or as well as, portable clothes rails.
- **Clear a surface:** Make use of a table or kitchen bench for laying out clothes and accessories.
- **Set up a 'try it on spot':** You could make use of a bathroom, bedroom or set up a full length mirror behind a privacy screen.

You might like to use signs to allocate areas to different types of clothes, so guests know where to put their items when they arrive.

Longer or bulkier items, like dresses, pantsuits or jackets are better on racks, while smaller items, like knits or skirts can be folded on a table.



When guests arrive

- **Tell people where to put the clothes** they have bought along and that they need to wait until everyone has arrived before trying things on.
- **Wait until most guests have arrived** and unpacked their clothes, and everyone has had a chance to relax, chat, and maybe have a drink or a snack.
- **Get people's attention and let them know:**
 - where they can try things on;
 - what will happen to clothes that are left over; and
 - why you are having a clothes swap – some ideas can be found in the **Unfashionable facts** section.
- **Declare the swap 'open'.** You could ring a bell, toot a horn or tap a spoon on a glass!



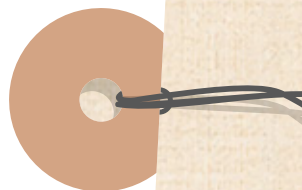
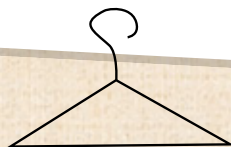
At the end of the party

It's likely you will have leftover items from your swap. To keep these out of landfill you can:

- **Share the sorting:** Ask your remaining guests or your designated co-host to help fold and bag up the leftovers for donation. You can distribute the packed bags among guests, so everyone takes one load to a charity shop near them.
- **Target specific causes:** Consider putting aside specific items for a specialised local charity or community drive. For example, look for local winter coat drives, or charities that provide vulnerable women with professional corporate workwear.

Have you worn that coat 100 times?

To offset the carbon that goes into making a coat, it should be worn a recommended **100 times**.¹¹ It doesn't have to be you wearing it - it could be your friends or people in your community! Swapping or donating clothes is a great way for an item to get more wear, for longer.



Event checklist



A month before

- ☐ Fix a date
- ☐ Send invitations at least two weeks before the event
- ☐ Go through your own wardrobe

The week of

- ☐ Gather or borrow hangers and clothes rails, mirror etc. if needed
- ☐ Think about how you will make room and where people can try things on

The day of

- ☐ Set up your space
- ☐ Put out glasses, plates, make tea/coffee, drinks



At the start of the event

- ☐ Have guests put out the clothes they've brought along to swap
- ☐ Briefly explain the try-on spots, left-over plans, and purpose (see 'Unfashionable facts' section for ideas)

At the end of the event

- ☐ Pack up leftover clothes in bags
- ☐ Take to charity of your choice or distribute amongst guests to donate



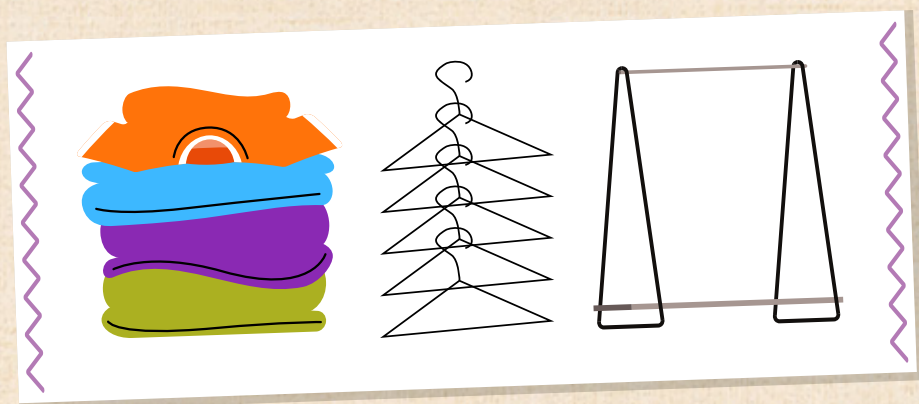
After the event

- ☐ Share pics of everyone enjoying their new clothes
- ☐ Set a date for the next one!

Keep it going

If you find that your event is a success and you want to hold regular seasonal wardrobe swaps with your network, consider these long-term tips:

- **Invest in a shared kit:** If you think you might like to host regular swaps and you have some storage space, consider investing in a 'kit' of hangers and racks. Flat hangers and racks that you can pull apart are easier to store. Secondhand shops often have these items if you prefer not to buy new.
- **Set aside your swapping items:** If you have a group of friends you would like to regularly swap clothes with, advise them to set aside a space (a drawer, a basket, a box) where they put aside clothes to bring to swaps.
- **Share around hosting:** Consider alternating hosting duties with your regular clothes swap buddies. Your 'clothes swap kit' could also be shared around.



Unfashionable facts



Every year in Australia

- We buy on average **56 new items** of new clothing per year – the highest of any country in the world¹
- We toss **200,000 tonnes of textile waste** into our landfills annually,² (about 1,150 tonnes in Merri-bek³)
- We ship another **100,000 tonnes of unwanted textiles** overseas⁴
- We spend an estimated **\$20 billion on clothes**⁵
- We only **wear about 40%** of what we own⁶

New clothes take a lot of resources to make

- It takes up to **2,700 litres of water** to make one T-shirt. That's enough drinking water for one person for 2.5 years⁷
- The global fashion industry produces **more global carbon emissions** than international flights and shipping combined⁸

We need to buy fewer new clothes

- There are enough clothes on the planet right now for the next **six generations to wear**⁹
- To be sustainable we should buy no more than **6 new items** of clothing per year⁹



We need to wear the clothes we own more

- Worldwide, the average garment is only worn **7 to 10 times**¹⁰
- To achieve environmental sustainability, a garment should be worn at least **30 to 100 times**, depending on the type of clothing¹¹

Footnotes

- ¹ Emilie Perrot and Nina Gbor, *The Environmental and Social Cost of Australia's Fast Fashion Addiction*, (Canberra: The Australia Institute, 2024), 12–14, australiainstitute.org.au.
- ² “Fast Fashion Waste Facts,” Clean Up Australia, last modified February 11, 2025, cleanup.org.au.
- ³ Merri-bek City Council (2025) *Circular Economy Strategy*, 10–11, merri-bek.vic.gov.au.
- ⁴ Perrot and Gbor, *The Environmental and Social Cost*, 19–21.
- ⁵ “Apparel Market Industry Insights: Australia,” Statista, last modified January 2026, statista.com.
- ⁶ Clean Up Australia 2024, *Fast Fashion Fact Sheet*, Clean Up Australia, viewed 18 August 2026, cleanup.org.au.
- ⁷ European Parliament, 2020. *The environmental impact of textiles and clothing production and consumption*. Briefing. Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: europa.eu [Accessed 18 August 2026].
- ⁸ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future*, (Cowes: Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017), 38, unccd.int.
- ⁹ Lewis Akenji et al., *Unfit, Unfair, Unfashionable: Reshaping Fashion Consumption for a 1.5°C World*, (Berlin: Hot or Cool Institute, 2022), 54–57, hotorcool.org.
- ¹⁰ Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2017). *A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future*. Ellen MacArthur Foundation.
- ¹¹ Kuźmycz, A. (2024) *How much is too much? The maths behind having a sustainable wardrobe*. Adelaide: Torrens University Australia.



Share your swap with us!

We would love to hear about your clothes swap and if you found this guide useful. Please send an email to wasteprojects@merri-bek.vic.gov.au and tell us how it went!



More information



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