

# Parent's Dorm Shopping Guide

## What to Buy, What to Skip, and What to Check First

A practical shopping planner for parents who want to help without overbuying, duplicating roommate items, or spending money on things the dorm may not allow.

**What this PDF includes:** parent shopping priorities, budget planning, buy-before vs wait-to-buy lists, school-rule checks, roommate questions, shared item planning, move-in day reminders, and notes for your student's actual dorm.

Student	School / dorm	Move-in date

### Quick Start for Parents

- Ask for the official housing rules before buying appliances, candles, lights, or furniture.
- Measure first if the school provides room dimensions, bed height, closet size, or furniture size.
- Have your student text their roommate before buying shared items.
- Start with sleep, bathroom, laundry, cleaning, medicine, and documents before decor.
- Set a budget before opening a dozen shopping tabs.
- Pack a separate first-night bag so essentials are not buried in bins.

**Parent mindset:** The goal is not to buy every dorm item online. The goal is to cover the essentials, avoid banned items, and leave room for your student to adjust once they see the space.

## Before You Shop: Questions to Ask

These questions prevent duplicate purchases, wasted money, and move-in day surprises.

■ Is the bed Twin XL, Twin, Full, or a different size?	■ Are mini fridges, microwaves, kettles, or coffee makers allowed?
■ Can the bed be lofted or raised?	■ Are extension cords, candles, string lights, or space heaters banned?
■ What furniture is already provided?	■ Does the dorm have air conditioning?
■ Is there a closet, wardrobe, dresser, or under-bed space?	■ Will your student have a car, or are they flying?
■ Is the bathroom communal, suite-style, or private?	■ What is the roommate bringing?

### Student + Parent Shopping Boundaries

Decision	Parent handles	Student chooses
Essentials	Budget, safety, basic quality	Colors, style, comfort preferences
Decor	Spending limit	Actual theme, photos, lights, wall items
Shared items	Cost split if helping	Roommate agreement first
Appliances	Rules check and wattage limits	What they will actually use
Clothes	Seasonal basics	How much they really want to bring

**Reality check:** If your student has not seen the room yet, avoid buying bulky furniture, big rugs, extra shelving, and too many organizers. Those are usually better after move-in.

## Buy Before Move-In

These are the safer purchases to make early because most students need them regardless of layout.

■ Twin XL sheet set if the school confirms Twin XL beds	■ Laundry detergent and stain remover
■ Mattress protector or mattress pad	■ Basic cleaning wipes or multi-surface cloths
■ Comforter or washable blanket	■ Trash bags and small trash bin if not provided
■ Pillow and pillowcases	■ Medication, first aid, insurance card, and prescriptions
■ Shower shoes or slides	■ Chargers, power bank, and surge-protected power strip if allowed
■ Towels and washcloths	■ Planner or basic school supplies
■ Laundry hamper or bag	■ Reusable water bottle

## Wait Until You Know the Room

■ Large rugs	■ Extra lamps if lighting is unknown
■ Extra shelving units	■ Over-door organizers if door style is unknown
■ Bulky drawer systems	■ Large kitchen supplies
■ Bean bags or extra chairs	■ Printer if campus printing is available
■ Big decor pieces	■ Too many storage bins before measuring under-bed space

**Best parent move:** Buy the boring essentials first, then plan one small shopping trip after move-in once your student knows what actually fits.

## Ask the Roommate First

Shared items are where parents accidentally double-buy the most. Text before buying.

Item	Who is bringing it?	Split cost?	Notes
Mini fridge			Check school size/rules
Microwave			Check wattage/rules
TV / streaming device			Decide if needed
Vacuum or broom			One is usually enough
Rug			Wait for room size
Full-length mirror			Check wall/door rules
Coffee maker / kettle			Check appliances policy
Cleaning supplies			Simple shared caddy works

## Check School Rules First

■ Mini fridge size and energy rules	■ Bed risers, lofting, and furniture moving rules
■ Microwave wattage rules	■ Air fryer, toaster, hot plate, kettle, coffee maker rules
■ Approved power strips and extension cord rules	■ Pets, plants, and fish tank rules
■ Candles, incense, wax warmers, and open flames	■ Window covering and curtain rules
■ LED lights, string lights, and wall decor rules	■ Wall damage rules for tape, nails, hooks, and peel-and-stick items

**Do not assume:** Dorm rules vary a lot. A product that is fine at one college can be banned at another.

## Dorm Shopping Budget Planner

Use this as a starting point. Adjust based on what your student already owns, what the roommate is bringing, and what the school provides.

Category	Target budget	Actual	Notes
Bedding and sleep	\$75-\$200		Sheets, pillow, protector, blanket
Bathroom and laundry	\$40-\$120		Towels, caddy, shoes, hamper
Storage and organization	\$30-\$120		Wait on bulky pieces
Cleaning and health	\$30-\$100		First aid, wipes, meds
Desk and school supplies	\$25-\$100		Lamp, planner, notebooks
Tech and safety	\$30-\$150		Chargers, power bank, allowed power strip
Decor and comfort	\$25-\$150		Set a limit first

### Splurge, Save, Skip

Splurge if budget allows	Save on	Usually skip at first
Mattress topper if the bed is uncomfortable	Decor pillows and extra blankets	Bulky furniture before seeing the room
Good shower shoes and towels	Trendy organizers	Kitchen gear your student will not use
Durable laundry bag or hamper	Wall decor	Duplicate shared items
Allowed power strip and chargers	Extra storage bins	Printer unless truly needed

**Budget tip:** The cheapest item is not always the best value, but buying five versions of the same thing is worse. Buy fewer, more useful items.

## Move-In Day Parent Reminders

Move-in day goes smoother when parents bring practical help, not extra chaos.

- Pack a small tool kit: scissors, tape, screwdriver, zip ties, and labels.
- Bring water and snacks for everyone helping.
- Keep student ID, room assignment, parking info, and check-in details easy to access.
- Unload first, then organize. Do not decorate before the bed and essentials are set.
- Make the bed early so the first night is not stressful.
- Set up fan, charger, lamp, shower items, and medicine before leaving.
- Break down boxes and take extra packaging with you if possible.
- Do one final check: wallet, keys, ID, meds, chargers, towels, bedding, trash bags.

## What to Pack Separately

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|---|---|
| ■ First-night clothes and pajamas                           | ■ Sheets, pillowcase, comforter, and towel      |
| ■ Toothbrush, skincare, contacts, glasses, and shower items | ■ Trash bags, wipes, scissors, and tape         |
| ■ Medication, first aid, and insurance card                 | ■ Student ID, check-in papers, keys, and wallet |
| ■ Phone charger and power bank                              | ■ Water bottle and easy snacks                  |

**Parent note:** After the essentials are set up, let your student make some choices. The room does not need to be perfect on day one.

## Parent Do-Not-Overbuy List

These are common overbuys that sound helpful but often create clutter in a small dorm.

■ Too many towels	■ Big decor items before seeing the wall space
■ Too many shoes or seasonal clothes	■ Printer if campus printing is easy
■ Multiple comforters or extra bedding sets	■ Duplicate shared appliances
■ Large storage furniture before measuring	■ Large cleaning tools with nowhere to store them
■ Full kitchen sets for a dorm room	■ Extra school supplies your student already owns

### Parent + Student Final Check

Question	Answer / notes
What is our total dorm shopping budget?	
What did the school confirm is allowed?	
What is the roommate bringing?	
What are we waiting to buy after move-in?	
What still needs to be ordered or picked up?	
What should go in the first-night bag?	

**Best rule:** If the item is expensive, bulky, shared, or possibly banned, pause and check before buying.

