



Non-Toxic Dad



Non-Toxic Dad's Back to School Swap Out

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A Healthier Start to the School Year

As summer winds down and the crisp air of fall rolls in, families everywhere are preparing for the back-to-school rush. New routines, fresh supplies, and busy schedules can make it easy to overlook the small choices that impact our children's health every day. From the lunchroom to the classroom, the materials and products they use can quietly expose them to unnecessary toxins that build up over time.

This guide was created to help you make simple, practical swaps that reduce your child's exposure to harmful chemicals without adding more stress to your already full plate. I'm going to grade each item and give a much better non-toxic swapout! With these easy back-to-school swap-outs, you can feel confident knowing you're sending them off with the best start possible this school year! I hope this guide helps!

Cheers,

Warren



Non-Toxic Dad's Top Back-to-School Swapouts!



Swap That Plastic Water Bottle for a Stainless Steel One

Plastic water bottles may seem harmless, but I give them an F for a back-to-school grade! Many contain chemicals like BPA, BPS, and phthalates that can leach into the water, especially when exposed to heat from the sun, a hot car, or even the dishwasher. These chemicals are known endocrine disruptors, meaning they can interfere with hormone function, potentially affecting growth, development, and long-term health. Even “BPA-free” plastics can contain similar compounds that haven’t been thoroughly studied but may carry the same risks.

A high-quality stainless steel water bottle eliminates this concern entirely, providing a durable, reusable, and non-toxic way to keep your child hydrated throughout the day. Stainless steel doesn’t leach harmful chemicals, even when filled with hot or cold liquids, and it stands up to daily wear and tear far better than plastic. For the healthiest option, make sure to fill it with filtered water to remove chlorine, heavy metals, and other contaminants often found in tap water. This simple swap protects your child’s health while encouraging better hydration habits year-round. Let’s add I know Owala’s are a popular choice so swap out the plastic straw for a stainless one like [this](#)

Swap Out Chemical-Laden Hand Sanitizer

Many conventional hand sanitizers contain harsh chemicals such as synthetic fragrances, triclosan, and high concentrations of alcohol that can strip the skin’s natural protective barrier. I give these a grade of F, definitely failing! Some also include questionable preservatives and ingredients linked to hormone disruption or skin irritation. While these formulas may kill germs, they can also introduce toxins through the skin and leave hands dry, cracked, and more vulnerable to infection.



A safer option is to choose a non-toxic hand sanitizer made with plant-based ingredients, such as those using essential oils like tea tree, lavender, or lemon for their natural antimicrobial properties. Look for formulas that use skin-friendly moisturizers like aloe vera or glycerin to keep hands hydrated. You can even make your own by combining a small amount of organic aloe gel, grain alcohol, and a few drops of essential oil. These alternatives are just as effective at keeping germs at bay without exposing your child to unnecessary chemicals—and they smell naturally fresh without synthetic fragrance.



Swap the Bamboo or Organic Cotton Lunch Bag for a Safer Option



Bamboo and organic cotton lunch bags get a **B** for back-to-school gear. They are reusable, fabric-based, and much safer than synthetic vinyl or plastic bags. Many are made with natural fibers and free from harmful dyes, but some come with water-resistant linings that vary widely in safety. Certain linings can contain unwanted chemicals if you are not careful about the materials.

The best choice is a lunch bag made from organic cotton or bamboo with a PEVA or natural waxed cotton lining instead of PVC. These linings provide water resistance without the toxic additives found in vinyl or foam insulation. A well-made fabric lunch bag is not only healthier, but it is also washable and long-lasting, keeping your child's lunches safe from harmful chemicals while reducing waste from disposable bags.

Swap Rigid Plastic Pencil Cases for Safer Storage

Rigid plastic pencil cases earn a **C** in my back-to-school grading system. Many are made from polypropylene (#5), which is generally considered safer than other plastics, but others contain unknown blends. Glittery finishes, flexible plastics, or brightly dyed cases may bring in phthalates or flame retardants—chemicals linked to hormone disruption and other health issues.

A healthier upgrade is to go for a metal pencil case or a plain, uncoated wooden box, both of which are sturdy, long-lasting, and free from harmful plasticizers. If you prefer a fabric option, look for organic cotton or hemp zip pouches without synthetic coatings. By making this switch, you reduce the chemical exposure from a daily-use item your child handles all year long.



Swap Plastic Lunch Containers for Glass



Plastic lunch containers get an F from me. Many are made from materials that can leach chemicals such as BPA, BPS, and phthalates—especially when they are heated in the microwave, washed in the dishwasher, or exposed to warm foods straight from the pan. Even “BPA-free” versions are not always safe, as similar compounds can be substituted without long-term safety testing. Over time, scratches and wear in plastic containers can also create more opportunities for chemicals to migrate into food.

Switching to glass containers is a much safer choice. Glass is non-toxic, non-porous, and does not leach harmful chemicals, even when exposed to heat. It is also far more durable than people expect, especially if you choose tempered glass options with protective silicone sleeves—pair glass containers with stainless steel or BPA-free snap-lock lids for a secure, leak-proof seal. Not only will you keep harmful chemicals out of your child’s food, but you will also have containers that last for years without staining or holding on to odors.

Swap Vinyl Backpacks or Lunchboxes for Non-Toxic Alternatives

Vinyl backpacks and lunchboxes get a D from me. Vinyl, also known as PVC, often contains phthalates, lead, and chlorine-based plasticizers that can off-gas and leach over time. These chemicals are especially concerning when stored close to food or worn directly against the body for long periods.

A much better choice is a backpack or lunchbox made from canvas, recycled PET fabric, or organic cotton. These materials are more durable, easier to clean, and safer for everyday use. Choosing a non-toxic backpack means your child avoids daily contact with harmful plasticizers while still enjoying a functional, stylish bag.



Swap Scented Markers and Erasers for Fragrance-Free Art Supplies

Scented markers and erasers get an F without hesitation. They are loaded with synthetic fragrances, often containing phthalates, along with solvents that can be inhaled during normal use. These chemicals are linked to respiratory irritation, headaches, and even hormonal disruption, making them one of the most unnecessary school supply hazards.



Safe for Kids - natural ingredients
and food-grade colors 



Jumbo size in a classic shape
to promote correct writing grip 

A safer option is to stick with unscented markers from trusted brands like Crayola or to choose natural beeswax crayons for younger children. For erasers, go with plain, fragrance-free options made from natural or synthetic rubber without added scent. Kids will still have all the creative tools they need without breathing in harmful chemicals every time they draw or erase.





In Closing,

Back-to-school season is a fresh start! We are quietly investing in our children's health, focus, and long-term well-being. I have seen firsthand how these changes can work for your kiddos, and it is why I am passionate about cutting through the noise and giving you straightforward, doable upgrades that make a real difference. Hope this helps, and wishing your children a very happy 2025 school year!

