



# Dancing on a dime

MAKE BUDGET-CONSCIOUS PROM PLANS

BY WYNNE EVERETT

Prom planning is on the horizon, and while you look forward to a night of fancy fun, keep in mind that you don't have to break the bank to have a good time. Jennifer Benz — aka "Queen Bee" — runs the prom-planning Web site [prommafia.com](http://prommafia.com). She says you don't need a lot of dough to have a great prom. But you do need a budget and a good strategy. First, write down a budget that plans out how much you want to spend on each aspect of your prom. Next, get an idea of what you want and start looking around early. That way you won't feel pressured as prom approaches, and you will have time to shop for the best bargains.



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## Dress to impress

Have a plan for your outfit. "The stores don't necessarily like it when you do this, but you can shop in the stores and try on the dresses you like, then look for those dresses online where you might get a better price," Benz said. It's tempting to shop vintage stores and resale shops for good bargains. You can get a good deal there, Benz said, but you'll really have to work for it. "That's tough because you really never know what they'll have," she said. "Sometimes there are some really great finds, and sometimes there is nothing." Look for a dress that you might be able to wear again. When you're a poor college student, you might need a fancy dress for a big party.

## Maximize accessories

Even the stars wear fakes or borrowed jewelry to the Oscars, so don't think you need expensive new jewelry to look great at the prom. "Unless you have your heart set on real diamonds or real pearls, look for the inexpensive accessories that the teen retail shops all have. There are some really cute things out there," Benz said. Like the dress, consider choosing extras you know you can wear again. A new pair of shoes, earrings or a nice purse you'll use over and over makes the purchase less of a splurge. "It is a great way to add to your wardrobe," Benz said.

## Do your own 'do

When it comes to hair, makeup and nails, you and your friends know what looks good, and you can make the most of your budget here with a little do-it-yourself expertise. "There are some great tutorials online to teach you how to do it yourself," Benz said. "Or there is always someone in your group of friends who wants to be a stylist. If it looks good and saves money, great!"



## Stay with the group

Pre-prom and post-prom activities should be about spending time with friends, not spending too much cash. "I'm from California, and when I went to prom all the kids went to the beach for those parties," Benz said. "They were fun. Or we went to someone's house, which was also fun." If you don't have a cheap or free option like these for your parties, or you have your heart set on going somewhere that costs money, Benz says to use the same strategy she suggests for transportation. "If you're all going to do something together, you'll have fun and you can split the cost," she said. "Do it as a group."

## Don't wilt your wallet

The best way to stretch your budget with corsages and boutonnieres is to skip the fresh flowers, Benz says. "Personally, I'm not a fan of traditional corsages and boutonnieres because you just throw them away at the end of the night," she said. "What I prefer are corsages made from feathers, ribbon, etc. You spend money on them and you can actually wear them again, which is a much better use of your money."

## Take the ride in stride

The best way to keep transportation costs down is to share. "If you're going with friends, you can split the cost among two or three or four couples," Benz said. "That way it's not just you and your date paying for the limo or the party bus or whatever."