



How to run a Swishing (clothes-swapping) event

What is Swishing?

It is usually a fair assumption that most people have clothes in their wardrobe that they have not worn for at least a year. In fact, according to the organisation WRAP, as much as a third of your clothes have not been worn in this time. Usually, it is because clothes don't fit any more or because you haven't got round to bagging your excess clothes up and donating them to charity. A fun and effective option is to run a 'swishing' event. In this session, you and your guests will bring your unwanted clothes and, in exchange, update your own wardrobe with pieces you like: a cost-effective way of dealing with weight loss or gain or just a cash-free alternative to a spending spree!

Background?

Clothes swaps have been around for a while but the concept of 'swishing' was created by Lucy Shea of Futerra Sustainability Communications as a way to "Save money, save the planet, have a party" (www.swishing.com). It's not just cash that is saved in a swishing event; there is a clear environmental benefit, too. Over 5% of the UK's total annual carbon and water footprints result from clothing consumption – that is, the manufacturing, transporting, selling and disposal of clothes.

TOP TIP

Themed swishing usually works well – for example, a uniform swapping event at school.

For a smaller swish with friends, you might include a bring-and-share supper or wine and nibbles.

By running a swishing event, you are extending the useful life of clothing, which is good news – think about how you might use your event to raise awareness about this issue. Any leftovers you have at the end can simply be donated to charity, which also helps to avoid the build-up of clothes in land-fill.

What things do I need?

- A practical venue, taking into account numbers of people you might expect; either someone's home or a venue that is often used by the community if it's an open event.
- A list of items that cannot be accepted, rules and disclaimers (*see below*).
- 'I'm taken' stickers, if you are going to allow people to pick their clothes up at the end.
- Seating for people to meet and chat, as well as tables and/or rails to display clothes.
- If you decide to admit children, it is a good idea to provide some toys and a soft play area.
- Refreshments (depending on the venue).
- Free, reusable cloth shopping bags for you to give away – these are often produced for publicity, so see if your local council or businesses will provide these for free.



Running the session

Before the event:

Where and when

Think about the venue and the time of day. If you are going to invite a limited number of people then someone's home might be more appropriate than hiring a hall, for example. Saturday mornings are usually a good bet if it is an event open to the community but for friends-only you might prefer to host an evening Swishing party – it could be fun to combine Swishing with a bring-and-share supper. Organising a school uniform Swishing event near the start of term might work well.

For a larger or public event, it will be better to have somewhere for clothes to be dropped off beforehand so take this into account if you are planning to hire a venue and make sure you include drop-off information in your advertising.

Boundaries

Decide early on where your boundaries will lie: how 'used' can the clothes be? State that items need to be clean before you will accept them and list any types of clothing that you won't take.

As well as letting people know beforehand which items cannot be accepted, work out any 'rules' for the day and promote them. These rules may look something like this:

The rules of the Swish!

1. Everyone must bring at least one item of quality clothing, shoes or accessories. One token will be issued per item.
2. No item may be claimed before the swish opens
3. As soon as the swish is declared open, everyone may begin looking but nothing can be tried on or taken until half an hour has passed.
4. Items should be "purchased" using your tokens, at the exit desk
5. Any items left over at the end of the swish will be donated to charity. If you want to take your items back you will need to have spare tokens.

Remember: no scratching, spitting or fighting!

Managing risk

In order to protect yourself, you should display a disclaimer that might use similar wording to:

"Persons taking part in a swishing party do so at their own risk. Cumbria County Council [or your own organisation] accepts no responsibility for items swapped and gives no warranty as to the condition, suitability or provenance of any item swapped. Please take all reasonable measures to check the condition, suitability and provenance of any item swapped for your own protection. Cumbria County Council accepts no liability for any claim or loss resulting from any transaction taking place at the Swishing party."

Consider insurance – if you are holding your event in a public building such as a village hall, church or school, it is likely that your event would be covered but you should check this is the case.

On the day:

1) Getting started: organising your volunteers

Make sure all your volunteers have read the rules and the disclaimer and are aware of how you want the event to run. Allocate jobs to your volunteers as follows:

- Categorise clothing and accessories by type (tops, trousers, skirts, bags, shoes etc.) and by size, to make it easier for people to work their way through the items.
- Be at the door to greet people, take any extra items and allocate tokens – one per item of clothing they bring in.

If you are serving refreshments, some volunteers could take charge of this too – but don't forget to offer cups of tea to your volunteers!

2) The swishing! – 45-60 minutes

Don't allow anyone to take items of clothing until 30 minutes after the swishing has started so that everyone gets an equal chance to look.

After half an hour, people are free to 'pay' for their chosen items of clothing by handing over their tokens at the paying station. Remember to record roughly how many clothes have been swished for evaluating the impact of your event.

Have refreshments available so that people can chat to each other while the swishing comes to an end.

3) Benefits of swishing and setting the challenge – 10 minutes

When people have had a chance to sit down and chat over refreshments, get their attention. Thank them for coming and explain why you are running the event. You might begin to outline some of the benefits of swishing with the following quote:

“Save money, save the planet, have a party: swishing effortlessly touches all of these buttons. Swishing parties are for all those women [and men!] who want to combine glamour, environmental protection and frugality.”
Lucy Shea

You can then give them some statistics from WRAP’s ‘Valuing Our Clothes’ report:

- the average UK household owns around **£4,000 worth of clothes** – and around 30% of clothing in wardrobes has not been worn for at least a year;
- extending the average life of clothes by **just three months** would lead to a 5-10% reduction in each of the carbon, water and waste footprints; and
- an estimated **£140 million worth** (around 350,000 tonnes) of used clothing goes to landfill in the UK every year.

(Source: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/valuing-our-clothes>)

Set the wardrobe challenge. Ask everyone to go through their wardrobes when they go home and see whether 30% of their clothes really are languishing in there. Encourage them to take these to charity shops or to swap between themselves.

4) The team photo

Just before you end your event, ask everybody to pose with their ‘new’ clothes for a team photo. Add this to your own marketing or facebook page and share it with us so we can promote your success.

After the event

Packing away

It is quite likely that you will have some clothing left at the end of the session. Decide before your volunteers disappear what you intend to happen with these. The best thing to do is probably to bag up the clothes and take them to a local charity shop. You may prefer to list them via your nearest Freecycle group, Freecycle or suchlike.

Further information and support

WRAP’s report, ‘Valuing Our Clothes’, and other information on clothing and waste can be found at <http://www.wrap.org.uk/blog/2012/07/what%E2%80%99s-lurking-back-your-wardrobe>

<http://www.swishing.com/> - the website of ‘Swishing Founder’, Lucy Shea.

Find your nearest Freecycle group at <https://ilovefreecycle.org/groups/north-west> where you can list excess clothing for free.

Information about donating to charities can be found at <http://www.recyclenow.com/re-use>