

## **The Family Swap**

**By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog**

If the words “family swap” conjure images of you and your cherubs cowering in a lean-to in Appalachia while the Clampetts skin squirrels in your Great Room, I suspect you’ve watched as much reality TV as I have.

(Speaking of...ask me about my Reality TV Rehab Program [results may vary]. No, you cannot watch the *Housewives*. No, not even *Orange County*. Yes, I know it’s the original one, and I also want to know all about how Vicki feels during her daughter’s health crisis or if Alexis’ nose surgery was really medically necessary or how Gretchen does in Vegas as a Pussycat Doll, but it’s time to move on. Repeat after me: PBS.)

No, by family swap, I mean a way for you to get all the extra stuff you thought you needed when you bought it into the hands of people who can actually use it. In the process, you have some family- and community-oriented fun as you gather to give away what you don’t need and take what you do.

Back in 2007 (you know, Season 2 of the *OC Housewives*), my pal Michelle & I organized our first swap at our kids’ elementary school. The swap was 100% Michelle’s idea, inspired by:

- 1) her sincere affection for other people’s stuff (OPS) found at thrift shops, garage sales, and curbs everywhere;
- 2) an established swap in a neighboring town run by a swap guru who generously shared her wisdom with us; and
- 3) Swap-O-Rama-Rama, a clothing swap combined with DIY workshops run by crafty seamstresses who help swappers customize their finds.

Given how much I hate stuff in general (my dream home is a teepee), and OPS in particular, it took a little time for me to warm up to the swap. I tend to agree with George Carlin when he said, “A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. That’s what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff.”

But the benefits of swapping soon trumped my stuff-o-phobia: keeping unwanted stuff out of landfills and incinerators, getting stuff to people who need it, reducing unnecessary purchases, and showing our privileged kids (and our privileged selves) that you don’t always have to buy new. (Oh, and I’d be lying if I said the pile of wooden Thomas the Train tracks that my then 4-year-old son scored—since re-swapped—didn’t cement my affection.)

The Yantacaw Family Swap ([www.facebook.com/pages/Yantacaw-Family-Swap/107031839336793](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Yantacaw-Family-Swap/107031839336793)) is now in its fifth year, and I'm always impressed with the high-quality donations we receive, both from our elementary school families as well as from the community at large. Each year, more swappers come out to shop, and what isn't taken is donated to local charities, so just about everything finds a new purpose.

The swap may not trend like Alexis' nose job, but it is fully compliant with all reality TV rehab programs, and can definitely be enjoyed with pride.