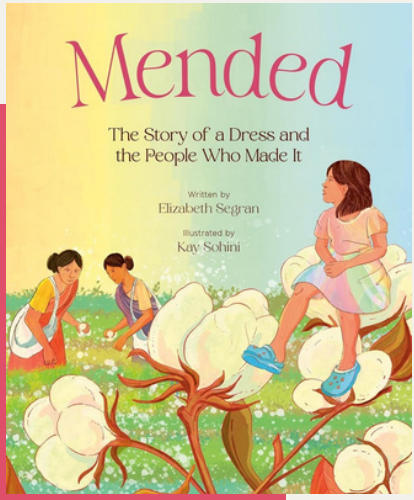
SUSTAINABLE FASHION TOOLKIT

FOR KIDS

Elizabeth Segran

Inspired by Mended: The Story of a Dress and the People Who Made It

MEET MENDED



Inspiration

This toolkit is inspired by Mended: The Story of a Dress and the People Who Made It, coming out in April 2027 through Kokila/Penguin Random House.

The Story

There's a hole in Lucy's favorite dress — but she refuses to toss it and buy a new one. Instead, she heads next door to Mrs. Garcia, a talented seamstress, and together they mend. As the sewing machine whirs under Mrs. Garcia's neat stitches, they talk about the incredible journey the dress has taken around the world.

Indian farmers planted and picked the cotton. Truck drivers hauled heavy bales to the city. Weavers spun fibers into yarn that sailed across the ocean on a huge container ship to China, where workers transformed it into cloth and dyed it every color imaginable, until a seamstress in LA's Fashion District finally cut and stitched it into the dress Lucy loves.

With Kay Sohini's elegant, detail-rich art, journalist Elizabeth Segran shines a spotlight on the millions of workers who make our clothes — and shows young readers why mending, re-wearing, and thoughtful consuming matter.

HOW TO SHOP

BUY FEWER, BETTER

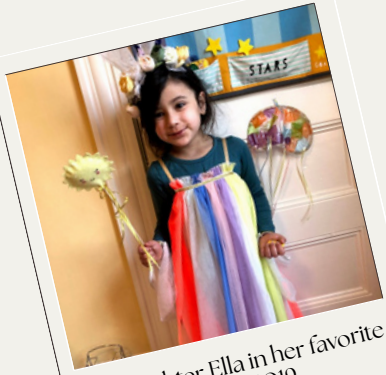
Ten pieces your child loves beats fifty they feel lukewarm about. When you do buy new, go for quality — thicker, more durable clothes cost more upfront but will survive playtime. A well-made piece can outlast one kid, get passed on to the next, and still have life left in it.

TRY SECONDHAND FIRST

Good news: we're living in the golden age of secondhand. Online, you've got ThredUp, Facebook Buy Nothing groups and the resale sites of Hanna Andersson, Tea Collection, and Patagonia. In person, thrift and consignment shops are treasure hunts waiting to happen. Or host a clothing swap with friends. And never underestimate the humble hand-me-down — siblings, cousins, and friends are an untapped gold mine.

ASK QUESTIONS

Where was it made? Who made it? What's it made of? If the answers make you uncomfortable, put it back.



My daughter Ella in her favorite dress in 2019.



Her little sister Lily wearing it in 2026.

READ LABELS LIKE A PRO

That tiny "Made In" label we all ignore? It's telling you where a real person lives and works, someone who cut, pinned, and stitched this exact piece of clothing with their hands. It’s worth noting that worker protections are far stronger in some countries — Japan, the U.S. — than in others, like Bangladesh or Cambodia. Knowing this can shape what we buy and push us to favor brands that treat their workers well.

A GUIDE TO COMMON MATERIALS

Natural Fibers

Cotton, wool, hemp, linen, cashmere, and silk come from plants and animals. They will eventually biodegrade.

Synthetic Fibers

Polyester, nylon, spandex, and acrylic are made from fossil fuels, shed microplastics, and do not biodegrade. Rayon, viscose, and modal are made from chemically processed wood.

Recycled Fibers

Made by breaking down old materials, like plastic bottles or used fabric. Recycled plastic-based fibers shed microplastics.

Organic Fibers

No synthetic pesticides were used to grow the fiber. This is better for the planet and for farmers.

ICONS TO LOOK FOR



The fabric is organic.



The people who made this were paid fairly.



The company must show it cares for people and the planet.



The fabric is free from harmful chemicals.



The fabric is made from trees from protected forests.



The garment is made with safer chemicals and less waste.



The garment uses recycled materials.

CARING FOR KIDS' CLOTHES

A ripped knee or mud stain is a badge of honor. Kids don't stress about imperfect clothes — and neither should we. And when laundry day comes, full loads in cold water are the best way to save energy.

MENDING IS MAGICAL

A hole doesn't have to be the end of the garment. Visible mending — patches, stitches — turns a worn-out spot into the best part of an outfit. Iron-on patches are a great place to start for little ones. Older kids can learn the satisfying art of needle and thread. Or, like Lucy in Mended, you can seek out a skilled seamstress and watch real magic happen. Either way, a little mending goes a long way — adding years to a favorite piece and making it truly one of a kind.

STAINS TELL STORIES

Messes are proof of a good day — grass stains, chocolate smears, the marks of childhood in full swing. Happily, today's stain removers are better than ever. A dab of The Laundress's Stain Solution, worked in early, can rescue a favorite piece and add seasons to its life. But the deeper trick is to loosen our grip and let some marks be. A faint stain isn't damage — it's a little souvenir of a life well lived.

WHEN YOU'RE DONE

DONATE LOCALLY

Here's a hard truth: a lot of clothes dropped in clothing donation bins end up shipped to Ghana or Chile — and many end up in enormous trash heaps. Skip the bin. Pass them to a friend, or post them on a local Facebook Buy Nothing group. One kid's outgrown jacket is another kid's favorite thing.

SELL THEM

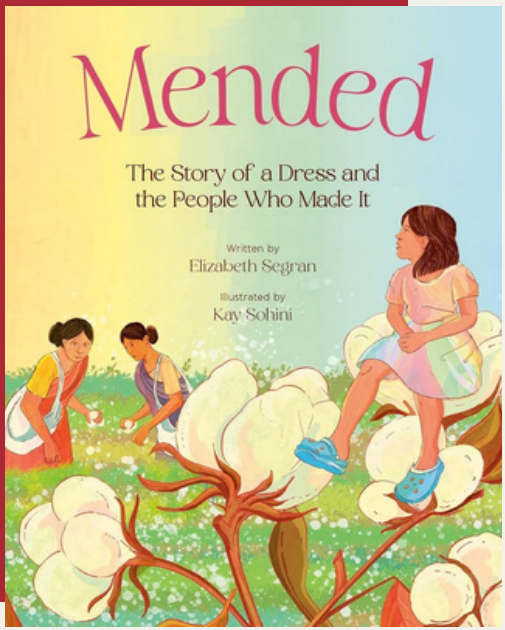
If it's in good shape, sell it. Simple reason: if someone pays for something, they're likely to use it. Many brands — Patagonia, Hanna Andersson, Tea Collection — have their own resale sites. Or send them to ThredUp or Preloved You. Bonus: a secondhand price means another family can afford something they might not have otherwise.

TEXTILE RECYCLING

The system isn't there yet — but it's coming. Startups like Circ are building the infrastructure to make recycling clothes as easy as recycling an aluminum can. In the meantime, H&M, Zara, and Reformation have in-store collection bins and are stockpiling textiles to be recycled when the technology catches up. Drop them off and consider it a bet on the future.

PREORDER MENDED

Mended launches April 6, 2027 through Kokila/Penguin Random House. If you'd like to support it before then, preordering is the single most meaningful thing you can do to help the book reach readers. A copy doesn't have to be for you or your own child. It also makes a thoughtful gift for a grandchild, a niece or nephew, a classroom, a community center, or your local library. Scan the QR code here to preorder.



Every stitch tells a story.

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