

FOR TIGHTWAD MOMS: HOW TO PATCH A PAIR OF PANTS

By Beth Proudfoot

Well, it's three weeks into school and already my fourth-grader has worn holes in the knees of all five of his brand new \$26 school pants. Forced to choose between buying new pants, telling him he can't play at school, having him wear shorts (ouch), returning the pants to Lands End to cheekily ask for new pants in their 100% guarantee program, or patching them, I got out the ironing board and the sewing machine. I've done quite a lot of pants-patching in my time (I have three boys) so by now I've got the process down to a science. Are you craft-challenged? Here's Patches 101.

The secret to easy patching is to glue the patches on the pants before sewing. You can buy patching material at the fabric store (look in the "Notions" section at Hancock Fabrics for a small package of navy blue Bondex Fabric Mending Tape). However, it's expensive (\$1.35 for a package that will probably only do one pair of pants. It's also not quite the right color. My solution is to sacrifice one pair of pants, cut it off at the knees to make shorts and then use the material from the knees down to make patches for the other pants. Instead of Bondex, buy $\frac{1}{4}$ yard of Stitch Witchery or other bonding material.

I make the patches BIG – after all, they double as knee-pads for my little darling. Layer the material, and Stitch Witchery so you can cut out 2 patches and 2 pieces of bonding material that are exactly the same size. Don't measure. To make sure they're symmetrical, fold one patch in quarters, cut the corners in a curve and use your eye to clean the edges up, then use it as a pattern for the rest.

Iron the patches to the pants with the Stitch Witchery in between (or, use Bondex). Those with "difficult" children might want to put patches on both sides of the pant material. Despite what it says on the package, all these adhesives do come undone in the wash, so the patches will have to be sewn on. Snake one leg onto the arm of your sewing machine all the way to the bottom of the patch, then twist the material so you start sewing in what will be the bottom left hand corner when the pants are being worn. This can be a challenge with smaller pants, but I've done size 5 Slim – you just have to be careful to keep your folds of fabric out of the sewing path. Set your machine for a thin zig-zag and sew all the way around. Voila.

Just a note about making shorts. Pleated pants taper quite a bit from the waist to the ankle, which can mean that when you try to turn up a hem there's not enough material on the inside – and you get bunching when you try to sew it. To solve this, make a very narrow hem ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch). Zig-zag or serge the edge, then pin carefully and machine stitch from the outside.

Okay, does all of this sound like too much work? I did five sets of pants in about an hour. At \$26 dollars a pair, that's a pretty good salary.

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