

How to Make a Child's Tote Bag

We are making these bags to be used by children at the Night's Shield Children's Shelter. When a child leaves the shelter, the administration puts all their possessions, mostly clothing, into a large trash bag for them to carry on to a foster home or other placement location. We are making these bags so the kids have a better bag to carry their things. They can use about 250 of these each year.

You will be making a fabric tote bag that is approximately 20" wide by 30" tall. When you cut the cotton or cotton blend fabric, cut it a bit bigger to allow for seam allowances and the top hem. Cut the fabric 41" wide by 32" tall if you're going to have one side seam and a bottom seam, and a folded side, or cut the fabric 21" wide by 63" tall if you're going to have two side seams and have a fold at the bottom of the bag. Sometimes you just have smaller pieces of fabric. In that case you can have seams on both sides and on the bottom (no folds) and cut two pieces each 21" x 32". If you have a yard of standard-width fabric, it will be 44" wide, folded to a double thickness of 22". It will be 36" long. With right sides together, trim off the selvedge edge and cut 4" off the 36" making it 32" tall. The folded edge will be one side, sew the other side and the bottom each with a ½ " seam allowance. Iron the rough top edge in ¼ " then fold and iron again at 1". Stitch that down to make the top hem. A drawstring can be added inside that hem or two handles can be added or you can make a tie similar to a twist tie that comes with large baggies. You have 4" of scrap fabric from the extra cut off the top. This can be used to make handles or even a little pocket or two. If you have some other contrasting fabric, it's good to use that.

It's wise to reinforce the side and bottom seams by either double stitching the first seam or by making a French seam (iron the seam allowances to one side and sew them down along one side, similar to a blue jeans leg seam).

A flat sheet can make several tote bags. Try to get one that will be appealing to kids. Use a new or lightly used sheet because an older sheet will not hold up as well.

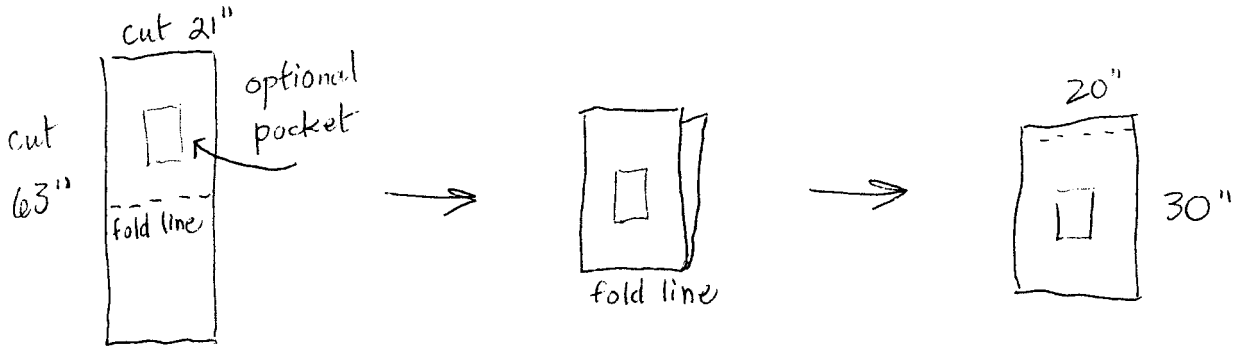
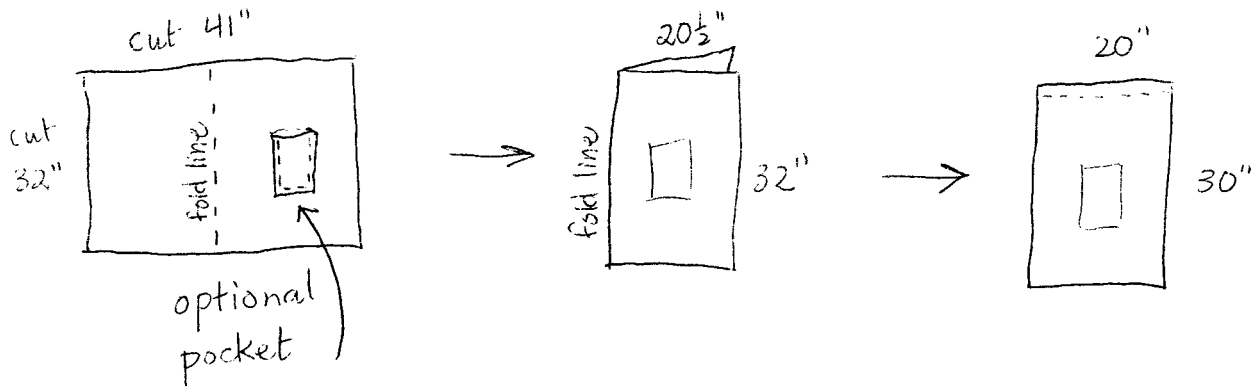
You can gusset the bottom (square it off) or leave it flat. You can add pockets if you want.

To make a drawstring top: Cut a ribbon or self-made fabric strip 50" long. Thread it through the top hem of the tote bag. This can be done by opening the side seam at the hem and attaching a large safety pin to the end of the drawstring to thread it through. The safety pin helps you move the ribbon through the tight hemmed area. Take off the pin after pulling the ribbon through. When both ends of the drawstring are out, sew or tie them together. Make sure raw edges of the hemmed top are finished.

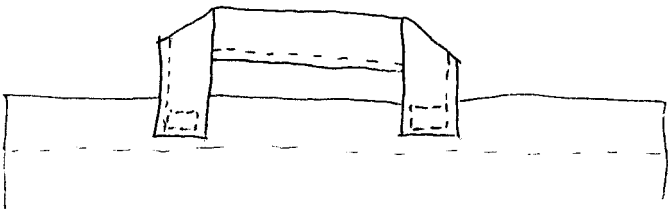
To make handles, cut a piece of same or contrasting fabric 3" by 18" long. Cut it in half making two 9" lengths. Use an iron to fold down ½ " on each of the ends, and ¼ " along the long ends. Then fold the handles in half (long way) and sew along the open edges. Now you have two handles each 8" long. Attach those at the top on either side, centered.

Another closure option is to cut a piece of fabric about 18-20" long and 2 ½ -3" wide. Finish it as above but leaving it as one piece, not cutting in two. The center of the finished tie can be sewed to one side seam a few inches from the top hem. Then this piece can be tied around the gathered top, sort of like a twist tie closing a bag of bread.

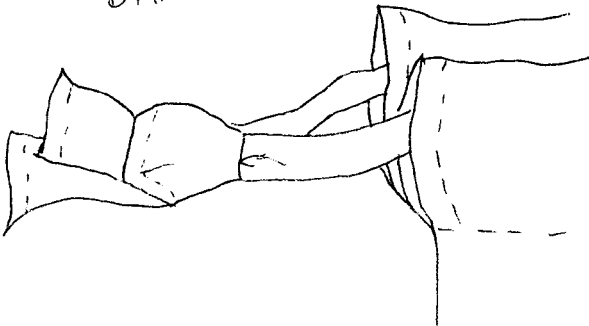
CHILD'S TOTE BAG



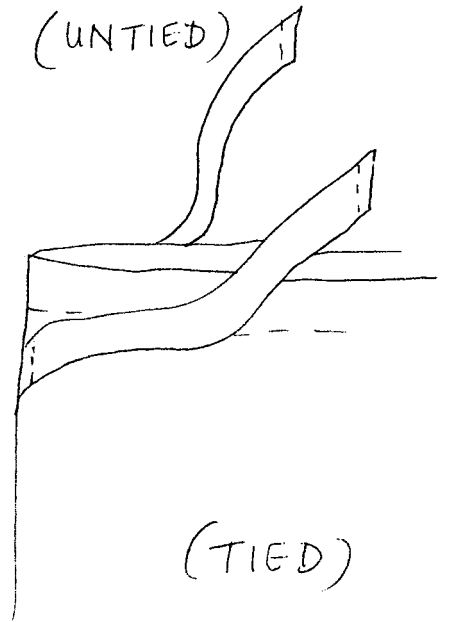
HANDLES



DRAWSTRING



TIES (UNTIED)



(TIED)

