



PREPARE FOR A FA-BOO-LOUS HALLOWEEN



2023



Halloween is usually an exciting time for kids, but for those with special needs, like physical disabilities, sensory difficulties or food allergies, the popular holiday may feel more challenging than celebratory.

Experiences like trick-or-treating or attending Halloween parties are ones children with these challenges may miss out on due to a lack of special accommodations or a fear of being singled out. But being able to participate in these festivities allows kids to feel more connected with friends at school.

Helping your child know what to expect this Halloween can help make it a fun time for everyone. Here are some helpful tips and resources to help make the night as enjoyable as possible.



PREPARE AND EDUCATE:

- Watch family-friendly cartoons and movies with positive scenes of children trick-or-treating and attending Halloween activities.
- To help your child with scary decorations, remind them that the sounds and decorations aren't real.
- Reduce any possible anxiety by maintaining your child's regular routine.
- Practice or role play trick-or-treating. This can be especially beneficial to children who are sensitive to new situations or environments.
- Knowing and respecting your child's limits will ensure that everyone has an enjoyable time.
 - This also provides an opportunity for your child to succeed, which builds their confidence and self-esteem.
- Avoid crowded areas - they can be overwhelming or distracting for children with certain disabilities. Big groups can also make crossing the street or going up and down curbs more dangerous.

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES:

When it comes to costumes, the most important thing to consider is how your child feels about them. Many costumes are uncomfortable: they itch, restrict movement, and tend to overwhelm those with sensory issues.

If your child is open to dressing up for Halloween, please consider the following tips:

- When looking for a costume, check out the pajama section of the store. There are lots of comfortable clothing/pajamas that look like costumes.
- Get costumes that aren't going to irritate the skin or get them big enough to wear other clothes under them that the child is used to.
- Avoid masks or anything over the face
- Have your child practice wearing their costume before Halloween, doing so will help them to get comfortable in their costume and ensure it fits properly
- Avoid accessories or unnecessary props that could cause sensory overload.
- Let your child be the guide. If your child is excited about their costume, it'll show and the experience will be more enjoyable for them.



SAFETY:

- Before you leave to go trick-or-treating, take a picture of your child in their costume.
 - This will ensure you have a recent photo of your child that captures what they are wearing in case they get lost.
- Ensure that your child is easily seen by you and others. This is especially important if your child tends to wander.
 - Use glow-in-the-dark bracelets or necklaces.
 - Add reflective tape to their costume and/or trick-or-treating bag.
- Likewise, wear something that distinguishes you from the crowd so your child can easily find you.
- Make sure your child has some form of identification on them and a way to communicate that they are lost
 - Order/make bracelets or necklace tags that have identifying information on them.
 - Write your name(s) and cell phone number(s) on paper and put in the pockets of clothing your child is wearing.
 - Consider temporary tattoos or writing your contact information somewhere on your child's body with a pen/marker.
- When in crowded areas, keep your child close by or hold their hand. Try the "bookend" approach where one adult is on each side of your child if needed.

SENSORY NEEDS

- Bring along items tailored to your child's sensory needs: ex. Noise blocking headphones, ear plugs, weighted vests, comfort items, etc. (bonus if these items can be incorporated into your child's costume)
- As mentioned above, have your child practice wearing their costume before Halloween to find out if it's uncomfortable and if adjustments need to be made.

TRICK-OR-TREATING

- Visit the neighborhood or locations that you are going to trick or treat at earlier to get your child used to where they will be visiting.
- If your child uses a communication system, have a symbol or card (or a card that simply says "Trick or Treat") for them to give to the person at the door letting them know they may not use verbal communication.
 - printable card - [option 1](#) or [option 2](#)
- Create a role play trick or treating to practice in your home.





DECORATIONS

- Avoid houses with scary decorations when trick-or-treating
- To help your child with scary decorations, remind them that the sounds and decorations aren't real
- If change of scenery brought on by decorations is difficult, gradually decorate. Show your child pictures of your house all decorated from previous years.
- Consider including Halloween-themed sensory toys and decorations your child can touch such as slime, squishy brains, stretchy skeletons or spiders, googly eyes, etc.
- For those handing out candy, be mindful of your decorations. Children with special needs may have a heightened sensitivity to loud noises, bright lights, or unexpected sounds. Minimizing or turning off spooky decorations for the time being can reduce the chances of startling them.
 - OR position your decorations away from your main path.



TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS HANDING OUT CANDY:

- Display an autism and disability friendly trick or treat printable in your home.
- Be mindful that some children may not use verbal language.
- If you're on door duty, be cautious of anything that's too scary, make sure you can clearly communicate, and be considerate of how your costume is perceived by others.
- Be understanding, welcoming, patient, and accommodating. Try to not rush anyone through the candy picking process!
- Sit at the end of your driveway. Especially if your house has stairs or a steep driveway, it may be challenging for some kids to knock on your door.
 - Sitting closer to the road doesn't only help those on crutches or in a wheelchair, but it can also feel more inviting to an anxious trick-or-treater.
- Keep on outdoor lights. Cracks and bumps in the sidewalk can make navigating a path tricky.
- If able, try handing out tangible items (like stickers, bubbles, glow sticks, fidget spinners, toys, etc.) for children who do not eat candy or have feeding tubes.
 - If handing out candy to a child with limited vision or who may be blind, describe the candy and let them make a choice.



RESOURCES:

- Halloween Tips for Children on the Autism Spectrum - video click [HERE](#)
- Halloween & Autism - Tips for a Fun, Safe Experience - video click [HERE](#)
- Easterseals MORC's Halloween Party - [FREE Activity Book](#)
- Alternate Halloween Activities - click [HERE](#)

