

## ***Halloween Preparedness for Families and Neighbors of Children with Autism***

Fall is quickly approaching, and with it come the festivities of Halloween. Since the holiday is traditionally celebrated by children, there is no arguing that Halloween is a family affair. Dressing up in fun costumes, collecting candy, and pumpkin carving are some of the typical activities that children look forward to each year. However, for families of children with autism, Halloween can sometimes be stressful. Fortunately, there is a tremendous amount of resources available to ensure Halloween is fun and enjoyable for everyone. Our downloadable guides and printouts can serve as resources for your family, as well as your neighbors and friends. Take a look at how you can start planning for a successful Halloween for the whole family today.

### **Is Your Child with Autism Ready for Trick-Or-Treating?**

One of the first questions families of children with autism find themselves asking as Halloween approaches is, "How do I know if my child is ready?" The answer might not be black and white. For many families, this year might be the first time they are considering introducing their child to Halloween and its related festivities. If you find yourself wondering if your child is ready, Dr. Richard Solomon, a trusted and celebrated professional in the autism community, has put together a few questions to help families with this important decision. Your child's ability to follow routines or commands are two important factors to take into consideration. Having a good understanding of how your child reacts to loud noises and unexpected lighting will also come into play. Visit this site to see the full list of questions and tips that Dr. Solomon has shared for families to use when making this important and complex decision.

### **Visual Understanding**

A simple, fun, and entertaining way to begin preparing for Halloween is introducing the concept and expectations through popular story books. Skeleton Hiccups, Click, Clack, Boo, and The Night Before Halloween are some classics families might want to consider. There is no such thing as too many books or good stories!

If you have the time, some professionals encourage families to make their very own visual storybook. This would allow family members to tailor the introduction of the spooky holiday as much as they would like. Autism Speaks provides the public with an amazing and free story template, All About Halloween, that allows your family to teach and prepare your child for the festive day.

### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Practicing the holiday can create an opportunity for you to be better prepared for whatever you have planned for that day. Though it may make sense to wait until the day of any Halloween festivities to debut costumes, this could potentially stress your child. It can be beneficial to not only try costumes on ahead of time but to also hang out and play in them. In doing so, your child will be able to see how it feels to have the costume on for extended amounts of time or what it is like to move around in it. Having a "dress rehearsal" ahead of time will give families ample time to problem solve if any unexpected issues arise. If your child is hesitant or reluctant to dress-up, don't worry. There are plenty of "costumes" that kids can explore that allow them to mostly wear their own clothes. Here are some ideas and inspiration if you find yourself in this situation.

Practicing the route for trick-or-treating and even the process of ringing bells and knocking on doors can be invaluable. This also creates an excellent opportunity to reach out to neighbors and other members of the community to share any important information or concerns that you might still have. If you are concerned with the potential of crowds and noise, you may consider asking your neighbors to allow you and your child to trick-or-treat alone in the days before Halloween. This will allow your child to have a similar experience, without all of the noise and distractions the night-of.

## **Inform Your Neighbors**

Families who choose to practice trick-or-treating can find ways to turn this into the ultimate opportunity. Unfortunately, there are many people who are still unaware of how the holiday can impact those with autism. We have included a flyer that families could distribute if they choose to do this. Families who have children with restricted diets can also use this opportunity as a chance to drop off pre-approved candy or treats for their specific child or children.

## **Familiar Faces and Places**

A fun and sweet way that might help things go smoothly is making arrangements to participate in trick-or-treating and other festivities with familiar faces and close friends. This sometimes isn't possible, but it definitely is worth a shot. Another easy and efficient strategy families can take is using printable cards such as these. For children who are nonverbal, this could be a meaningful way for them to participate and communicate. Taking on Halloween with children with autism may seem daunting at first, but by taking advantage of some of these resources, you will hopefully see how much assistance and support is available to make this holiday fun for everyone.

## **Pack a Sensory Bag**

Preparation can make or break the success of any experience, and though you will want to hope for the best, it is wise to prepare for the worst. With a sensory bag, families will be able to take on every potential twist and turn that the spooky night might have in store. Flashlights, ear plugs, and noise-cancelling headphones or earmuffs are excellent items to pack when leaving the house for trick-or-treating. Asking your child to pick out and pack a favorite item can be a good idea in the event of needing a little familiarity and comfort.

## **Set Goals and Expectations**

Having a set idea of the number of houses you would like to visit is a great goal to keep in mind. Whether it be 2 or 20, you can tailor your goal as the night goes on. For your child, trick-or-treating may not just be about getting candy. Each new door or personal interaction is an opportunity to improve upon skills such as responding and other various verbal and motor skills.

## **Halloween in the Time of COVID-19**

It goes without saying that Halloween might have a slightly different look and feel this year. The ongoing global pandemic continues to alter daily routines and the way in which the world functions. Wearing a mask while in public is the way communities have been encouraged to battle COVID-19. This can be challenging for all children, but children with autism face additional obstacles. Wearing a mask may just not be possible for some children, and if that is the case, that is okay. Going trick-or-treating is not the only Halloween activity. Your family might want to explore other face mask options, but, ultimately, it is essential that your child's needs are met. Always listen to the cues your child gives you.

## **Trick or Treat Alternatives**

Perhaps trick-or-treating in the neighborhood just isn't an option for your child. There are plenty of alternative ways to celebrate the holiday. Many neighborhoods offer "trunk-or-treating" as a safe alternative to the traditional door to door method. Additionally, visiting a pumpkin patch, going on a hayride, reading more Halloween books, coloring themed printouts, and even trick-or-treating in your home are great alternatives to traditional Halloween day festivities.

**DEAR NEIGHBOR,  
WITH HALLOWEEN UPON US,  
PLEASE KEEP IN MIND**

**THE CHILD GRABBING MORE THAN ONE  
PIECE OF CANDY MAY HAVE TROUBLE  
WITH FINE MOTOR SKILLS**

**THE CHILD TAKING LONGER TO PICK OUT  
A PIECE MAY HAVE MOTOR PLANNING  
ISSUES**

**THE CHILD WHO DOES NOT SAY 'TRICK OR  
TREAT' MAY BE NON-VERBAL**

**THE CHILD WHO ISN'T IN COSTUME MAY  
HAVE A SENSORY ISSUE OR AUTISM**

**THANK YOU &  
HAPPY HALLOWEEN!**



# MAKE HALLOWEEN FUN FOR EVERYONE



## HOLIDAY TIPS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM



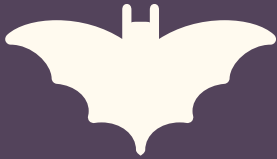
### PLAN AHEAD

A SIMPLE WAY TO PREPARE FOR HALLOWEEN IS TO INTRODUCE THE HOLIDAY THROUGH POPULAR STORY BOOKS THAT EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT AND EXPECTATIONS.



### DRESS UP

LET YOUR CHILD HANG OUT AND PLAY THEIR COSTUME SO THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SEE HOW IT FEELS TO HAVE THE COSTUME ON FOR EXTENDED AMOUNTS OF TIME. HAVING A "DRESS REHEARSAL" AHEAD OF TIME WILL GIVE YOU TIME TO SOLVE ANY UNEXPECTED SENSORY ISSUES.



### PRACTICE

PRACTICE TRICK-OR-TREATING AND THE PROCESS OF RINGING BELLS AND KNOCKING ON DOORS. YOU MAY CONSIDER ASKING YOUR NEIGHBORS TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO TRICK-OR-TREAT ALONE BEFORE OTHER CHILDREN.



### PREPARE

IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE ALREADY, CONSIDER PACKING A SENSORY BAG. CONSIDER INCLUDING NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES OR EAR MUFFS, A FIDGET TOOL AND EVEN SUNGLASSES. PACK A TOY OR FAVORITE ITEM IN THE EVENT OF NEEDING A LITTLE FAMILIARITY AND COMFORT.

HI, MY NAME IS \_\_\_\_\_  
AND I HAVE AUTISM. I MAY  
SAY 'TRICK OR TREAT'  
DIFFERENTLY, OR NOT AT  
ALL. PLEASE ACCEPT THIS  
AS A THANK YOU FOR A  
YUMMY TREAT.



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