



## Tips to Make Halloween Enjoyable for Children with Autism Spectrum

The very things that can be so exciting to neurotypical kids wearing the costume of a favorite character, being outside with other kids who also have on costumes, knocking on doors to ask for treats, and getting treats from every house you visit can be anxiety producing for children with autism spectrum disorders.

Wearing a costume is unfamiliar, as is going from house to house to ask for treats. New routines and behaviors can be enjoyable for kids on the spectrum when they are approached with planning, and the necessary supports are identified and provided. Following are some things you can do ahead of time to help your child enjoy this child-focused occasion:

1. Begin early (even a month before) to prepare your child for Halloween activities. Read a story about Halloween and the activities that surround it, like carving pumpkins, wearing costumes, and trick-or-treating. Teach your child the skills involved in participating knocking on the door, holding out the bag, saying “trick or treat” or using assistive technology (a picture or device) to communicate the message, and then saying “thank you.”
2. Help your child choose a costume that will reflect his interests. Let him practice wearing the costume around the house while practicing the skills. If wearing a costume is irritating, ask him if he would rather wear face paint, a scarf, or a hat on Halloween. No costume is also OK.
3. Write a social narrative describing what your child will do on Halloween. Include in this story information about wearing the costume (if she will) or face paint, and carrying the trick-or-treat bag. Identify which houses your child will visit, what your child will say at each house, and what she will do with the treats she receives.
4. Create a visual schedule with the Halloween activities for the evening marked on it.
5. Let your child practice trick-or-treating with familiar individuals and houses. If he has a restricted diet, give these individuals special treats for him.
6. Keep the trick-or-treating session short and comfortable. If two houses are her limit, that is fine.
7. Teach your child to give out candy for trick-or-treaters. Use role play to let him practice the skill before Halloween. Write a social narrative about this aspect of Halloween so he will know what to expect and what to do when the doorbell rings that evening. This way, even if his trick-or-treating session is short, he will be involved in the celebration.
8. Remember, practice helps make any activity feel like a routine!

