



HALLOWEEN TIPS!

Halloween is quickly approaching. As a kid, this was always one of my favorite holidays. Carving pumpkins, dreaming up a costume (then trying to make it), and collecting pillowcases full of candy. What could be better?

As an adult, however, I see the spooky side of Halloween — and I'm not talking haunted houses. No, it's children out on the streets at night, often wearing costumes that restrict their ability to see and be seen. It's candles being used carelessly in jack-o-lanterns, or children carving pumpkins while unsupervised by an adult. It's lots of people traipsing through unfamiliar yards and neighborhoods.

Carve safely! Carving pumpkins can be tons of fun for kids, but make sure that all carving activities are fully supervised by an adult. To ensure that kids can participate, have adults make the needed cuts and ask children to dig out pumpkin seeds or refine the edges of cuts with a spoon. If you're working with very young children, skip the knives all together and decorate pumpkins with markers, glitter glue or paint.

Use flameless candles. They're safe, inexpensive and just like the real thing — without the fire risk. If you insist on using real candles, place candlelit pumpkins on a sturdy surface away from curtains and other flammable objects. Never leave candlelit pumpkins unattended.

Ensure others can see your children. If possible, create costumes out of bright colors. But if you must go over to the Dark Side, place reflective strips or tape in strategic places on your child's costume, much like equipping a bike with reflectors. You can also consider clipping a flashing bike light onto their treats bag. Several companies make small, lightweight, inexpensive lights that can be used for these purposes.

Ensure your child can see others. A mask can obstruct your child's peripheral vision, increasing the chance that they will trip or bump into objects. Consider using kid-friendly, nontoxic makeup instead.

Don't let children under the age of 12 trick-or-treat alone. Enough said!

Set ground rules for older children. No one should leave the house without agreeing when to be back and what route to use. Provide them with a cellphone and a flashlight with fresh batteries and review basic safety rules, including staying with the group, walking only on the sidewalk, approaching only clearly lit homes, and never going inside a home or car for a treat.

Inspect treats before indulging. Although tampering with candy is rare, it's best to inspect all candy before letting your child eat it. (This will also ensure you're regulating how much they're eating!). Discard torn packages, unsealed treats or anything that just doesn't look right. For young children, remove gum, peanuts, hard candies and other choking hazards. And watch out for ingredients that may trigger food allergies.

Make your house trick-or-treat friendly. Don't be that one house on the block that everyone's afraid of because the dog barks and lunges at people and the porch light is out. Before it gets dark, clean up the yard and the walkway and check to ensure the outside lights work. Place the pets in a safe room away from the front door. If the doorbell bothers your cat or dog, tape over it and keep the door open so you can see trick-or-treaters coming and meet them. And remember that black cats left outside on Halloween can become targets for mischief—best to bring them in.

Of course, depending on your job or other responsibilities, Halloween may be just another regular night for you. If you're driving, watch for children darting between parked cars or crossing in difficult-to-see places. Be especially careful entering or leaving driveways and alleys.

With some planning and commonsense safety, you can leave the "spooky" side of Halloween to the ghosts — and create a memorable, exciting experience for your children.

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