

Halloween tips shared by our district

Halloween is a time of excitement for most children in North America. For children and youth who have special needs such as Autism, children who have experienced trauma, or children who are new to Canada, Halloween can be difficult to comprehend and fear evoking. With this noted, in anticipation of the up and coming Halloween activities, please consider the following and feel free to share these resources with parents:

1. **TRY TO STICK WITH NORMAL ROUTINES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.** If there are schedule changes, put those into a visual schedule and give the child time to adjust to something new. Parents, to keep things running smoothly at home, always try to maintain bedtime and meal time routines.
2. **USE VISUAL AIDS.** Pictures and videos of what to expect may help alleviate anxiety. It is a good idea to introduce the subject of Halloween a few weeks in advance. If the child has been through Halloween before, it is always good to remind them that it is coming up so that they may prepare.
3. **REHEARSE.** If there will be a school costume parade, pre-walk the route for a few days so students know what to expect. If they are going trick or treating, encourage parents to pre-walk the route for a few days so that children know what to expect. Practice social cues by rehearsing questions and answers children may hear on Halloween night, and going through trick-or-treating routines.
4. **TRY OUT THE COSTUME BEFORE THE BIG DAY/NIGHT.** Practice putting on the costume, and wearing it multiple times prior to the day/night itself.
5. **LET THE CHILD KNOW THE TIME FRAME FOR EVENTS.** If there will be a costume parade, show when that will happen on the schedule, when it will end, and what they may look forward to when it is over. Similarly, if the child is going out trick or treating, show when that will happen on the schedule, when it will end, and what they may have to look forward to once it's over. If the child is staying home to help parents with handing out candy rather than trick or treating, prepare them in advance for how long that will be and what they might expect.
6. **WORK AT THE CHILD'S LEVEL.** If you anticipate that the child will be extremely anxious about seeing others in costumes, have them watch from a distance until they decide if they want to engage. Parents, in preparation for the evening, prepare your child for unannounced visitors. Children also may be very excited and want to greet everyone and hand out candy themselves. They may run up to each house excitedly, or not want to go up at all, but may enjoy the walk around the neighbourhood. Each child with Autism is unique and will enjoy and participate in Halloween in their own way.
7. **PARENTS, ALLOW FOR SOME DOWN TIME BEFORE TRICK OR TREATING.** Work some quiet time into the day to prepare, prior to the evening festivities.
8. **KEEP AN OPEN MIND ABOUT WHAT HALLOWEEN LOOKS LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD.** Some children with Autism love costumes, yet may make unconventional choices; others find wearing a costume uncomfortable or even stressful. Some children will want to walk up to each house; however, they do not want to, or may not be able to say, "trick or treat"; if that is the case, please see below for a *Trick or Treat Card* that they may use.
9. **DON'T FEEL BAD IF IT IS EASIER FOR A CHILD TO SIMPLY NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY GIVEN YEAR.** Remember, there is no "fail". Perhaps you had planned a parade around the entire school, however, the child only makes it outside the classroom, or perhaps they cannot make it out the classroom at all. Perhaps parents have planned an entire neighbourhood walk, however, the child only made it to three houses, or perhaps they could not make it out the door at all. There is no such thing as "failing a holiday". Please reinforce to parents that it is okay to close their door and draw the blinds, or to put up signs asking people not to ring the bell if that is what needs to happen this year.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS IS BEING TOGETHER AND GIVING A CHILD A SENSE OF CARE, SAFETY AND SECURITY. School and family holiday experiences are unique, so feel free to create your own.

Feel free to use/print these [Trick or Treat Cards](#) and to use these [social stories](#) to prepare students for Halloween:

- [What to Expect on Halloween](#)
- [Halloween Social Story](#)

Some of the above recommendations are a modification of a resource provided by Autism Awareness Centre, Inc.