

# PFA Tips

## Halloween Safety

**W**e KNOW not to run into the street. We KNOW not to talk to strangers, or accept gifts from them. We KNOW that when we dress-up, it's just pretend. But when everyone around us is dressed so strangely, and running around from house to house, and let's admit it – probably on a sugar high – it can be really hard to remember these rules. Adding to the confusion is that we are allowed to break some of our typical rules for just one night. So let's take some time and go through these before that night of chaos.

### So much for the other 364 days we tell our kids never take candy from a stranger

If I can't explain this rule-break to my neurotypical child, how am I supposed to explain it to my child with autism? For our kids, the logical thinkers who prefer the rules never change, this holiday tradition may be hard to comprehend. Best bet – stick to homes and candy-givers you know.

### See and be seen

It's dark out, and in the excitement, many of our kids might run into the streets. So give cars every opportunity to see them. You might consider skipping the costume shoes and donning the light-up sneakers if you have them. It's easy to put on glow wear – bracelets or necklaces. But you have to take into account the habits of your child. Do they put things in their mouths? If so, you might want to purchase reflective safety stickers. Flashlights will provide not only indication of their whereabouts, but will also let them see what's ahead, help them identify friends in the dark, etc.

### Put the knife down – the pumpkin is unarmed

"I want to do it myself!!" It's a common mantra of all children. If you anticipate a struggle about who gets to carve the pumpkin, elect a decorative method with instruments that are less sharp – like paint brushes and markers.

### Safety in numbers

Go trick-or-treating with your child, and maybe with a group. Pair your child up with a neurotypical buddy that can help your child remember the trick-or-treating rules,

and be another set of eyes on your child amidst the flurry of masquerading candy goers. If you have other children, make sure you have a plan in case your child with autism wants to go home before your other children are done.

### Photos are fun and practical

It's typical to want to capture Halloween memories with photos. But there's a practical side to this as well. Take a picture of your child in their costume before you go trick-or-treating so if they elope, you can help neighbors and law enforcement identify them on the streets. If your child gets separated from the pack and is missing, call 911 IMMEDIATELY rather than wait and search yourself.

### Do not enter

We teach our kids that the rule is to knock on someone's door, and then enter when invited in. Except of course for Halloween, when we knock on many doors but stay outside. Since this may not be in your child's routine, you may want to practice this. And even though we teach our kids to never enter a stranger's home, another reason to stay with your trick-or-treater is that candy can be quite a lure.

### It's a prankster's night

We're familiar with the Halloween pranks – toilet papering the trees, egging the house, etc. Sometimes our kids can be talked into mischievous acts that "friends" have encouraged them to do. Have a talk with your child about the differences between good natured jokes and acts of vandalism, and the consequences that can go along with those acts.



### Don't play Magellan

Even if you heard a rumor that the candy is better three neighborhoods down the road, stick to the familiar streets and routes your child knows. The streets on Halloween can be chaotic, and imagine how confusing it could be for our kids if we also introduce new surroundings.

### Too much in character

When your child is playing dress-up, do they take on their characters like method actors? If so, do their costumes include fake weapons? Used with enough assertiveness, even a fake weapon can hurt. If your child absolutely must have (and we all know how difficult it can be to change our kids' minds once they're set...) a costume that requires weaponry as accessories, make sure they are soft flexible rubber. Because face it – even you can't pick up a fake pirate sword without giving it a good Jack Sparrow swish.

### Additional Resources

PFA Tips: Halloween (Make it a Better Experience) <http://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/seasonal/pfa-tips-halloween-make-it-a-better-experience>

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