

# Keeping Your Children Safe For Halloween Celebrations

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ALTON - Halloween is one of the most highly anticipated holidays for fun festivities, but it might look a little different this year. With any holiday or special event, families have the opportunity to get creative and create new traditions. The most important part about incorporating new traditions or going out for the classic trick-or-treating is communication. Communication is all about inclusion, and it is encouraging to include your children and what expectations you have of them.

Every celebration is entirely dependent on individual families. Offer security and consider the best options for you and your children. If you feel unsafe taking children out for Halloween, try to communicate that with your family and have conversations about the plans to include everyone. No matter what method of celebration you choose, it is important to set expectations and try to model those for your family to ensure a positive experience for everyone involved. Some options are to watch Halloween movies, to participate in classic “trick-or-treating”, go to a “trunk-or-treat” celebration, and have Halloween parties at home or Halloween candy hunts. The point of Halloween is to have fun and to implement ways for children to be interactive.

Halloween can be a very fun experience for everyone, but also keep in mind some of these practices for both trick-or-treating and for handing out candy at home:

- Always check your candy. “Create a rule that the parents are in charge of candy, and you can check the candy with your kids involved,” says Kanika Williams, Parent Educator for Centerstone. Let them know what you’re doing. It’s important to discard candy that looks like it has been opened, discard homemade items, and to include your child in the process.
- Consider costume safety. Make sure costumes and masks are breathable and not too tight or too loose. Come up with a way to make sure your child is visible during the night with reflective tape, flashlights, glow sticks, and more. To ensure safety in case your child were to stray away, try taking a photo of them in their costume with their shoes on to prevent them from being lost.
- Have a chaperone. Halloween can be a busy night with a lot of activity going on. Depending on how many children are with you, it might be useful to get another set of eyes to watch children with you and keep everyone on track. There can be a lot of night traffic, and so finding ways to help ensure your safety like having a chaperone and utilizing costume safety can make a difference.
- Encouraging your children. “One of the most important things about setting expectations on a night like Halloween is encouraging your child for their behavior. Saying things like you were so brave, you stayed with me, you were being safe and followed the rules can go a long way. The goal is to make this a fun and memorable experience,” says Williams.
- Have a backup plan. Halloween can be overwhelming for some children, and it’s important to be patient with them. There are a lot of scary decorations and costumes, long walks, and more. “Give your child options when it comes to being overwhelmed: we can walk together, we can skip this house or we can go home,” says Williams.

- Handing out candy at home. Keep in mind that not every child is the same. There are some children that are nonverbal or some that might have allergies. Try to use options like baggies or bowls of candy or even providing the children with toys and activities to include everyone.

Halloween can be a fun experience with healthy communication, setting expectations, and encouragement for good behaviors. This is the time to explore options and be creative in your approach when making decisions for your family. The most important part about Halloween is spending quality time with your family.

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, Centerstone can help. Give us a call at 1-877-HOPE123 (877-467-3123) to learn more.

*John Markley serves as Regional CEO in Illinois, serving residents in eastern and southern Illinois through more than 30 locations that provide treatment, support, and educational programs and services to individuals who have mental health and addiction disorders and specialized services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Centerstone employs over 525 staff in Illinois and serves more than 17,000 individuals annually.*