

From our October, 2010 Newsletter

## Happy Halloween!!

Halloween seems to be omnipresent these days. Don't underestimate how a holiday you may see as a fun Fall classic can be scary for children. If you **plan ahead** it will go a long way to helping ensure a successful and fun Fall celebration for all.



**Halloween presents an opportunity for rich sensory experiences.** It's important that you think about how your particular child will react to the activities and event that are part of this holiday.

Some children will adore making a jack-o-lantern, dipping their hands into the pumpkin and taking out the seeds. For others, it will be better to paint the pumpkin's outside, or even just stick on a pre-made face. Some children love to bob for apples, others will not want to put their face in the water. Your child may - or may not - love to close their eyes and dig into buckets of "worms" (cold cooked spaghetti) and "eyeballs" (grapes).

**Costume considerations:** When it comes to picking a costume (or not), you again need to consider your particular child. While vampires

may be all the rage this year, you need to know if your child can handle the feel of fake teeth, would want to have white face paint on their face, or would cringe at having dripping "blood" painted on their face.

---Masks: Many schools now prohibit the wearing of masks. If your child's school allows it, consider whether it is really a good choice. Will your child feel smothered by having something covering their face, or be bothered by the string that holds the mask on?

---Materials matter: Some children may not like the feel of cheap materials (or even the expensive ones) used to make many commercial costumes. Consider how often that costume may have to be taken on and off in the day for school parties and parades, and then again for Sunday trick or treating. Try on the costume and make sure it is a good fit. Let your child practice walking and sitting in the costume.

---No/limited costumes: And if your child doesn't want to wear a costume, let them know that that is ok. If it will make them (you?) more comfortable to feel like part of the crowd, put them in a team jersey or sports cap they like, or let them wear their camp or activity uniform. They may get a kick out of just wearing an easily made (or purchased) tee shirt that says "This IS my costume"!

**Games and activities:** Don't pressure your child to participate in games at home or at parties you attend. Pumpkin carving and face painting can be fine for some children and daunting for others. It may be best to test these activities out with your child at home first, before trying them at school or at a party.

**Host an event:** If you believe your child will be overwhelmed by Halloween activities, consider being the host of a Halloween event

you can "control". Since Halloween falls on the weekend this year, it may be a "bigger deal" than usual. But the weekend also gives you more chances to plan for a little controllable celebration. You can limit the number of children at your own celebration, set the rules about masks, require your pint-sized guests to check their costume-prop "weapons" at your door, bob for apples or not depending on your child's preference, pick party food your child likes and limit how scary the party is. You can control the volume of spooky music played. Create a mummy by wrapping a child (your own if they'd like the idea, or a different child if not) in toilet paper!

**Trick-or-treat:** How will your child feel about trick-or-treating? --- You might trick-or-treat just on your block, or go to a friend or relative's house, where the environment is friendly and familiar. What's important is not how many houses you go to, but how your child feels about the interaction. Picking a few homes where you know the families can go a long way in making the actual act of tricking-or-treating enjoyable for your special



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needs child.

---Start trick-or-treating early and before it gets dark. If your child is afraid of going trick-or-treating to houses they don't know, and that might appear scary at night, or of seeing others dressed up in dark outfits and costumes, keep them home. Let them be in charge of handing out candy to trick-or-treaters who come to your home.

---Or better yet for the child afraid to trick-or-treat: spend that day together watching a Halloween classic:"It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown"! Make dirt cups (chocolate pudding sprinkled with cookie crumbs) complete with gummy worms. Let them greet trick-or-treaters at your house and hand out candy.

