



## Anderson Center Consulting Autism Spectrum Disorder: Halloween Tips



Halloween Activity or Custom	Why this is challenging for people with Autism?	What supports and strategies may be helpful?
Anticipating the holiday	<p>Whether the individual is very excited about the day or a little nervous, some individuals with autism may find waiting for the holiday stressful and may perseverate on when it is coming or what will occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share specific information about your plans for Halloween. When will you purchase or make a costume? What time will Trick-or-Treating begin and who will be going? Consider using a visual support for the individual to reference (social story, written information, photos).</li> <li>• Cross off the days on a calendar to show how many days remain before Halloween.</li> <li>• To reduce stress, identify a limit of how many questions and conversations about Halloween can occur each day.</li> </ul>
Decorations in the home, neighborhood and community	<p>Things that are unfamiliar or changes to usual routines can cause anxiety.</p> <p>Some decorations may look very realistic and/or involve sounds and bright lights. These can be frightening to a person who takes them literally or overwhelming to a person with sensory sensitivities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about Halloween in advance. Discuss options for decorating at home.</li> <li>• Remind the individual that decorations and sounds aren't real and are just a way people like to celebrate Halloween. These can be avoided if they cause distress.</li> <li>• To help desensitize or reduce anxiety, play an "I Spy"-type game, "spying" ghosts, witches and skeletons (from a safe distance) in a neighborhood or community.</li> </ul>
Going to a corn maze, hayride, or pumpkin patch	<p>Things that are unfamiliar or changes to usual routines can cause anxiety.</p> <p>Some Halloween venues may have decorations that look very realistic and/or involve sounds and bright lights. These can be frightening to a person who takes them literally or overwhelming to a person with sensory sensitivities.</p> <p>An individual may become anxious in a corn maze when they cannot see the exit or anything outside of the maze.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a schedule for the day and let the individual know what to expect (go to the farm, walk through the corn maze, take a hay ride, look for a pumpkin in the field, pay for the pumpkin and leave).</li> <li>• Look into the corn maze before arriving to make sure it will not be too difficult or scary for anyone in your party.</li> <li>• Remind the individual that the activity is safe and just meant to be fun.</li> <li>• Allow the individual to "take a break" from festivities.</li> </ul>



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Wearing a costume and/or mask	<p>Some people with autism have sensory sensitivities that cause them to have aversions to certain textures, smells, sounds which can lead to increased anxiety.</p> <p>Some individuals with autism may experience increased anxiety when encountering familiar people who appear differently due to costumes or makeup (teachers, bus drivers, family members).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss costume options that meet sensory needs.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider those that do not require masks or have fabrics or restrictive elements that the individual may find aversive.</li> <li>○ Avoid costumes with face paint.</li> <li>○ A shirt with a festive Halloween design might be a good option!</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have the individual try on the costume a few times before Halloween so they can get used to how it feels.</li> <li>• Try getting the costume in a larger size so the individual can wear their own clothes underneath.</li> <li>• Prepare the individual in advance so they can anticipate familiar people looking differently.</li> </ul>
Going Trick-or-Treating	<p>Things that are unfamiliar or changes to usual routines can cause anxiety.</p> <p>Individuals with autism may have difficulty with social interactions. Some individuals may find interactions with unfamiliar people stressful or be unsure of how to navigate the exchange.</p> <p>Individuals with autism may find it stressful or frightening to see others in elaborate costumes especially those that make it difficult to see the person's face.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a checklist that identifies the steps involved (knock on the door/walk up to the store, say "Trick-or-Treat", choose a treat, say "Thank you").</li> <li>• Review common interactions that may take place during Trick-or-Treating (someone asking what you are dressed as, or saying "how are you?") and practice how to respond.</li> <li>• Identify a set time for how long Trick-or-Treating will happen or identify a number of houses/stores you will visit.</li> <li>• Consider staying close to home in case the individual needs a break or remember to "check-in" by asking if the person needs a short break.</li> <li>• Remind the individual that costumes are pretend and that it is just a person who is dressing up for fun.</li> </ul>
Giving out Candy to Trick-or-Treaters	<p>Things that are unfamiliar or changes to usual routines can cause anxiety.</p> <p>Individuals with autism often have difficulty with social interactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a checklist that identifies the steps involved (Answer the door, say "Hello", offer the treat, say "You're welcome" and "Good-bye" or "Happy Halloween" and close the door).</li> </ul>