



Trick or Treat Safety Tips



A serious note for parents:

Trick or treating isn't what it used to be. In most cities it's not safe to let kids walk the streets by themselves.

✘ Know what other activities your children may be attending, such as parties, school or mall functions. If they are going to be at a friend's home, get the phone number and make sure that you've met the parents.

✘ Explain to kids of all ages the difference between harmless tricks and destructive vandalism. Throwing eggs at a house may seem funny but they need to know the other side of the coin as well, that clean up and damages can ruin Halloween for everyone. Make sure kids understand that if they are caught vandalizing, they will be held accountable.

✘ Some sick people find Halloween a great night to hurt cats. Explain to your kids that animal cruelty of any kind at any time is not acceptable. Harming animals is not only morally wrong but punishable by law and will not be tolerated.

✘ As bad as it sounds, this is just a fact of life now. Check your local or state website for sex offenders. The official New York State Sex Offender Registry is www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/nsor. Look up your zip code to find a list of registered offenders in your area that includes street addresses. Familywatchdog.us displays the information on a map. Make sure that your kids stay away from these houses.

✘ Explain to children as simply as you can that some adults are bad and want to hurt children, that they should never go into a house that they don't know, get into a car or go anywhere with a stranger. Also, tell them what to do should someone confront them: to scream as loud as they can to draw attention and to run away as fast as they can to someplace safe.

Source: Halloween-safety.com



Children under 12 should trick-or-treat and cross streets with an adult. Older kids should stay in groups and let parents know where they are going.

- Use facepaint or makeup instead of masks, which may block vision.
- Decorate costumes and bags with reflective tape or stickers and, when possible, choose light colors.
- Carry a glow sticks or flashlight (no candles!) to help see and be seen by drivers.
- Only go to homes with a porch light on and never enter a home or car for a treat.
- Carry a cellphone for quick communication.
- Always walk on sidewalks or paths. If there are no sidewalks, walk facing traffic as far to the left as possible. Never cut across yards or use alleys.
- Cross the street at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks. Never dart out into the street or cross between parked cars.
- Look left, right and left again when crossing and keep looking as you cross.
- Put electronic devices down and keep heads up and walk, don't run, across the street.
- Make eye contact with drivers before crossing in front of them.
- Watch for cars that are turning or backing up.
- Allow a responsible adult to examine all treats and throw away any spoiled, unwrapped or suspicious items.





I'm not afraid of that shadow under the stairs.

Oh yes, I am!

Helping kids manage their fears

The bloodcurdling scream stops you in your tracks; your heart skips a beat as you see the look of horror on your son's face. The next sound out of his mouth is barely discernable, but your years of experience have made you an expert in translation. You let your breath out slowly as you realize there is no immediate threat to his safety.

"Spider!" he screams again as he scampers away from his eight-legged adversary.

As baffling as your child's (noticeably over-the-top) reaction to the spider seems, there is nothing abnormal about his fear. Kids can be afraid of everything from swimming in the ocean (what if there's a shark?!!) to scary Halloween masks (what if it really is a monster?!) to balloons (who doesn't jump when a balloon bursts unexpectedly?). While some fears may be easier to understand than others, they are all very real to your child, whether he's three or 13.

Fear itself is not a bad thing. It's that sense of dread or apprehension that can warn us, and protect us, from danger, evil or pain. But unreasonable, uncontrollable fear that is out of proportion to the situation can keep us from functioning at all. Helping your child manage, and perhaps eventually overcome, his or her fear takes time, patience and empathy.

Validate the feelings but not the source. It's important to respect your child's feelings and acknowledge the fears are all normal. But Googling "shark sightings" with your child before going on a beach vacation or checking every nook and cranny in your house for signs of the bogeyman could just backfire by making her more apprehensive. Likewise, pampering a child who is visibly upset about something scary can reinforce the notion that there is something to be scared about. (*Otherwise, why would mom/dad be paying so much attention to me?*) Express understanding about her fear then tell her you are confident she can overcome it.

Master the fear... Whether your child is afraid of the bogeyman, the neighbor's dog or a spider, he can overcome it with your help. Ask him for things that might help him get used to seeing spiders. "I notice spiders make you anxious. What do you think would help you get used to seeing spiders?" Maybe he can look at a spider through glass, where it can't climb close to him. Perhaps learning about spiders in a book will make him interested in rather than fearful of them.

...but give it time. Understand that if she's had a bad experience with, say, the neighbor's dog, it can take some time to overcome it. Start with her suggestions, taking small steps to build her confidence so she gradually works up to confronting the fear. Perhaps seeing a dog through the glass at a pet store is a first step, followed by petting a small dog on a leash. Most importantly, don't push/force a child to confront something that scares them.

Ban ghost stories. Halloween is a perfect time for scary stories — if your child is old enough or doesn't scare easily. A child who thinks he can handle a scary tale may think otherwise when his vivid imagination kicks in after the lights go out at bedtime. Be aware of what your children are reading and watching, and talk about the difference between fact and fiction.

Finally, don't make fun of your child's fears. Instead, provide reassurance and understanding. Both will go a long way to helping your child feel safe and secure. Chances are, those bloodcurdling screams will subside by the time he's, say, 20.



Please note: If your child's fears seem to interfere with his/her enjoyment or ability to fully participate in things he/she normally likes to do, consult a professional. A professional counselor can help your child develop coping mechanisms and learn to manage his/her fears.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Today's Parent: When Fears Take Over: Children's Phobias (<http://alturl.com/xvx5u>)
- Kids Health: Anxieties, Fears and Phobias (<http://alturl.com/3btas>)
- The Sleep Foundation offers tips on addressing fears in Children and bedtime fears and nightmares (<http://alturl.com/aswua>)
- AnxietyBC has a great story on anxiety called Parenting: Helping Your Anxious Child or Teen (<http://alturl.com/2vcsm>)