

No Tricks, Just Treats

Halloween Prep List for Foster Families

Halloween can bring costumes, treats, time with friends, and neighborhood traditions — and plenty of fun. It can also bring unfamiliar sights, sounds, routines, people, and expectations. Use this guide to help prepare a celebration that feels safe, predictable, and enjoyable for the child in your care.



Remember: Age is only a starting point. Children develop at different rates, and past experiences can affect what feels comfortable or frightening. Follow the individual child rather than assuming an activity is right for them based only on age.

Before Halloween **Start with a conversation and a plan.**

- ☐ Ask what the child already knows or remembers about Halloween.
- ☐ Ask what traditions, costumes, foods, people, or activities they remember fondly.
- ☐ Ask what sounds fun, exciting, uncomfortable, or scary.
- ☐ Talk about what Halloween may include (e.g., costumes, masks, decorations, darkness, crowds, loud noises, strangers, doorbells, candy, parties, or routine changes).
- ☐ Explain your family's plans — who will be there, where you will go, and approximately how long you expect to stay.
- ☐ Ask which activities they'd like to participate in and which they'd rather skip.
- ☐ Talk about any personal, cultural, or religious preferences that may affect activities, costumes, or themes.

Consider the Child's Age and Stage

Every child is different. Use these age-based tips as a guide, and always follow the individual child's needs and comfort level.



Young Children About age 5 and under

- ☐ Try on the costume before Halloween so it feels familiar.
- ☐ Look at neighborhood decorations during daylight.
- ☐ Explain that people in costumes are still the same people underneath.
- ☐ Protect familiar meals, naps, and bedtime routines as much as possible.



School-Age Children About ages 6–11

- ☐ Ask whether there are decorations, houses, movies, or events they want to avoid.
- ☐ Talk about what to do if friends want to do something scarier.
- ☐ Give them meaningful input into costume choices.
- ☐ Preview parties, haunted attractions, movies, or events before attending.



Preteens and Teens Age 12 and up

- ☐ Ask what they want Halloween to look like rather than planning the entire evening for them.
- ☐ Talk through parties, scary movies, social media, and peer pressure.
- ☐ Make sure they have an easy way to call or text if they want to leave.
- ☐ Offer age-appropriate alternatives that feel fun and inclusive.

Make the Plan & Enjoy the Night

A few simple preparations can help everyone feel more comfortable and focus on the fun.

Make the Plan Predictable

- ☐ Decide where you plan to go.
- ☐ Preview the route or event ahead of time.
- ☐ If helpful, take a walk beforehand and introduce the child to trusted neighbors.
- ☐ Keep important routines as consistent as practical.
- ☐ Talk about when you will leave and approximately when you will return home.
- ☐ Identify familiar homes, people, or places along the way.
- ☐ Explain what will happen at each house (ring the bell, receive a treat, and move on).

Plan for Comfort and Choice

- ☐ Agree on a word, signal, or gesture that means “I need a break.”
- ☐ Make sure they know they can skip a house, decoration, activity, or interaction.
- ☐ Identify a quiet place to take a break.
- ☐ Bring a familiar comfort item if helpful.
- ☐ Decide in advance what to do if they want to leave early.
- ☐ Remind them that changing the plan is okay.

Prepare for Trick-or-Treating

- ☐ Choose familiar, well-lit streets when possible.
- ☐ Consider going earlier if darkness or crowds may be uncomfortable.
- ☐ Start with a manageable route.
- ☐ Stay together and review pedestrian safety.
- ☐ Talk about what will happen with candy after returning home.
- ☐ Consider food allergies or dietary needs.
- ☐ Watch for signs they have had enough, even if they don't say so directly.



A little preparation can help more children enjoy the evening in a way that feels right for them.

Costumes, Plan B & After

1

BEFORE THE NIGHT

Choose a Comfortable Costume

- ☐ Let the child have age-appropriate input into the costume.
- ☐ Check that they can see and hear clearly.
- ☐ Consider alternatives such as animals, athletes, astronauts, artists, firefighters, nature themes, favorite foods, or hobbies.
- ☐ Make sure it fits comfortably and allows safe movement.
- ☐ Avoid masks, makeup, or themes they find frightening or uncomfortable.
- ☐ Let the child change their mind, even if they liked it when it was chosen.

2

IF PLANS CHANGE

Have a Plan B

Choose one or two alternatives ahead of time so they feel like real options — not a last-minute substitute.

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| 1 Hand out treats at home. | 2 Decorate, paint, or carve pumpkins. | 3 Bake or decorate seasonal treats. | 4 Have a family game night, or make a fall craft. |
| 5 Watch a child-selected, age-appropriate movie. | 6 Attend a daytime fall or Halloween event. | 7 Have a small gathering with familiar friends or family. | 8 Take a fall walk or another favorite autumn activity. |

Plan B should feel like a choice, not a consequence of changing the plan.

3

AFTER THE NIGHT

After Halloween

- ☐ Ask what they enjoyed.
- ☐ Talk about what they'd like to do differently next time.
- ☐ Avoid judging the evening by how many houses were visited or whether the original plan was completed.
- ☐ Ask if there's anything they'd like to make a tradition next year.
- ☐ Ask whether anything felt uncomfortable or surprising.
- ☐ Notice which preparations or choices seemed to help.
- ☐ Celebrate what felt good about the experience.



A Note for Neighbors

You may not know what experiences a child approaching your door brings with them. A few simple choices can make Halloween more welcoming.

SHARE WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS

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| ☐ Keep surprise scares away from the sidewalk or front door. | ☐ Let children decide how close they want to get to decorations. | ☐ Be patient with a child who doesn't say "trick or treat," make eye contact, wear a costume, or respond as expected. |
| ☐ Avoid teasing children who skip scary activities. | ☐ If you host an event, let families know what to expect. | ☐ Talk with your children about respecting friends who celebrate Halloween differently. |