

2022

# Halloween Guide for Kids *WITH* Autism



## 2022 HOPEBRIDGE HALLOWEEN GUIDE FOR KIDS WITH AUTISM

Shrieking skeletons, spooky music, flashing lights, smoke machines, itchy polyester costumes and what appears to be the underworld lurking in the night ... "This is Halloween ..."

While tons of fun for many, the sensory overload of Halloween can make The Nightmare Before Christmas a reality for children with [autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\)](#). It can leave caregivers frantic, too, but with careful planning, you and your child can enjoy the tricks and treats of Halloween!

With help from Hopebridge Board Certified Behavior Analyst Molly Sitz and Speech-Language Pathologist Stephanie Ramos, we created resources to set up your family for success this October!

### HERE IS WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE:



-  **Pg. 2** Quick Tips for Celebrating Halloween with Children with Autism
-  **Pg. 3** 6 Sensory-Friendly Costume Ideas to DIY or Buy
-  **Pg. 5** 10-Day Countdown for Fun, Fright-Free Trick-or-Treating
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## QUICK TIPS FOR CELEBRATING HALLOWEEN WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Whether attending Halloween events, trick-or-treating or just noticing all the seasonal changes during the fall, prepare your child now. This will help them handle changes in routine and any sensory sensitivities that may arise. Discuss Halloween-related goals with your child's therapy team so you can both practice along the way.

### STAY CLOSE TO HOME

Keep festivities in familiar areas, like your neighborhood, a family member's house, a trunk-or-treat at school, or a not-so-scary event hosted by their favorite zoo.

### BUDDY UP

There is comradery in trick-or-treating together. Invite friends, another autism family, or join an event from your local autism organization.

### KEEP PLANS SIMPLE

Set limits to avoid overstimulation and uncertainty. This could mean visiting five houses or limiting activities to one hour. Skip the haunted house the first year!

### BE CREATIVE

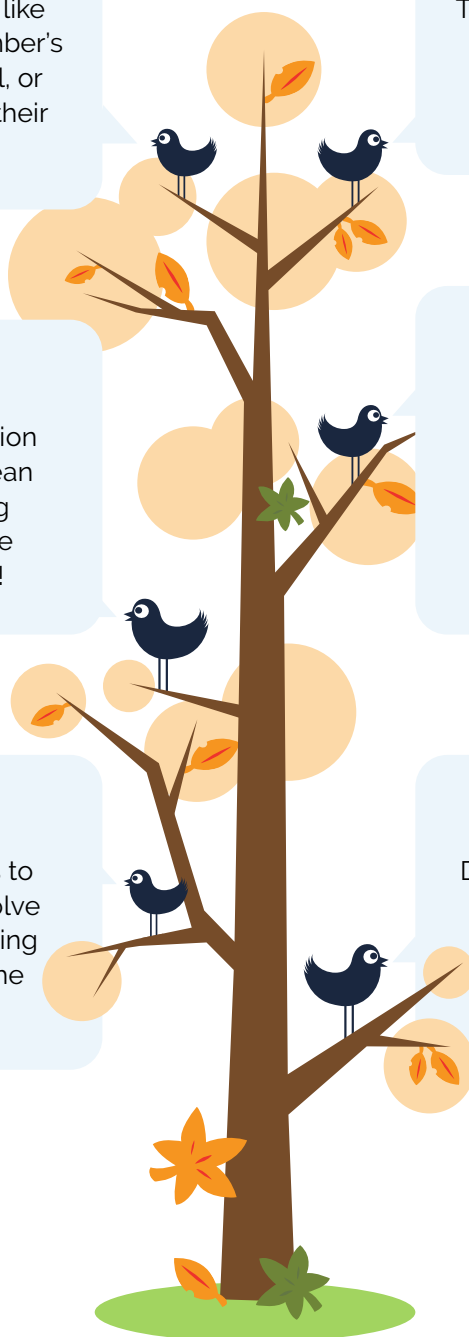
If trick-or-treating isn't your kid's thing, you can still make it fun! Hand out candy, host your own spooky movie "party," or indulge in a Halloween "hunt" to find treats around the house.

### DISCUSS AND PRACTICE

Use photos, stories and videos to chat about what to expect. Involve your child in the plans while using this guide's resources to set the tone and practice.

### KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Don't force anything. It should be fun, so follow your child's lead. Plan with intent but let go of expectations. Be flexible, adjust and take breaks, as needed.



## 6 SENSORY-FRIENDLY COSTUME IDEAS TO DIY OR BUY

Polyester, tulle, masks and wigs can be uncomfortable, so for a child with autism or sensory processing disorder, wearing a traditional costume may not be appealing. For others, princesses and pirates are just not interesting, so you may have to think outside the box to engage them.

No matter where your child's interests or challenges lie, here are six buckets of accessible, autism-friendly costume ideas, all without the itch factor, and all suitable for those who have minds of their own.

### Sensory-Friendly Store-Bought Costumes

From adaptive costumes to soft character dresses to superhero PJs, there are tons of inclusive offerings this year that are embracing comfort!



Adaptive costumes from Target



Soft character dresses & rompers



Superhero PJs from Amazon

### Special Interests

Get creative and focus on their favorite things! Does your kid love to open the doors in the freezer section at the store? Dress as a slice of pizza! Fascinated with NYC? Statue of Liberty! Passion for the alphabet? Turn a box into a scrabble piece.



Construction zone cone



Pizza costume



Statue of Liberty costume

### Easy DIY Costumes

Homemade, no-sew costumes are some of our favorites. As a bonus, you have complete control over comfort for kids as you transform a t-shirt, sweatshirt or box into an astronaut, Lego brick or dinosaur.



Astronaut sweat suit



Lego brick costume



Dinosaur t-shirt



## A Sweet Ride

Walking from house to house can be exhausting and distracting, even without wearing a full costume, so transform a wagon, stroller or battery-powered car into the ultimate ride as a dump truck, fire truck or vintage toaster!



Vintage toaster wagon



Dump truck



Fire truck

## The T-Shirt Costume

Costumes can be overwhelming, not solely for sensory reasons. If not into a full getup, there are plenty of t-shirt options perfect for the occasion.



Halloween-themed tees



Police uniform t-shirt



Toy Story tees

## A Family Affair

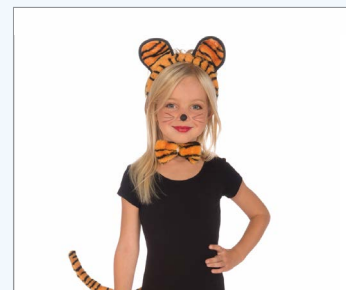
Group costumes are a great option! Have a sibling dressed as Jasmine? Join the "Princess Protection Agency." Shirts with Velcro capes are perfect for the cast of Star Wars or a legion of superheroes, and face paint paired with animal ear headbands can encourage them to join the circus with the rest of the crew.



Princess Protection Agency shirt



Darth Vader caped t-shirt



Tiger costume accessories

## 10-DAY COUNTDOWN FOR FUN, FRIGHT-FREE TRICK-OR-TREATING

In many cases, the preparation and countdown to a holiday is all part of the fun! Children with autism may need more explanation and guidance during Halloween. The purpose of the countdown – complete with tips and tasks! – is to prepare your family enough to ease frustrations in the future.

We recommend attempting one task per day, but don't stress! If an activity doesn't work out one day, try again tomorrow! The pressure should be off. This calendar won't make everything "perfect," and we don't expect it to do so. Rather, it should serve as a gentle reminder and guide with ideas for Halloween education and practice.

1

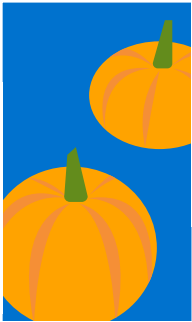
Use pictures, video and our Hopebridge **Halloween Social Story\*** to talk about Halloween.

2

Model saying, "trick or treat" and "thank you," in a way that suits your child. Pointing to a **sign**\* (see next page), pushing a recordable talking button, or dancing are all awesome, too!

3

Have your child try on their costume, even if only for a short time.



4

Plan your route. It can help to create a visual schedule or map that includes photos.

5

Decide on acceptable treats and what will happen with the candy on Halloween, then communicate with your child.

6

Practice trick-or-treating in the house with help from the guide's **printable on-and-off lights.\***

7

Walk the trick-or-treat area and practice staying together, holding hands or staying in a wagon. Make notes of houses or areas you'd like to avoid.

8

Read a Halloween book or create a Halloween craft together.



9

Practice knocking on a neighbor's or family member's door to trick-or-treat. Use this time to talk about why it's safe to do this only on Halloween and only with a caregiver.

10

You're almost there! Host a dress rehearsal, complete with costume, treat bag, communication devices and any other tools you'll need on Halloween.



# TRICK - OR - TREAT



THANK

YOU!

## TRICK-OR-TREAT PRACTICE LIGHTS

This is the Fort Wayne center's favorite way to prepare for Halloween! Now you can practice trick-or-treating at home with these printable house lamps. Hang them above or next to two separate doors in your house. Use these "lights" to help your child differentiate which is the appropriate house to approach and knock on the door. (For example, light on means knock, light off means skip.) As they practice, provide treats that will be similar to what they will receive on Halloween.





# My Halloween Social Story

## WHAT IS A SOCIAL STORY?

Social stories are tools that can be used to help individuals with autism learn what to expect and help prepare for certain social situations. Halloween can bring a lot of changes in routine and environment, so this Halloween-themed social story is intended to help your family answer questions and prepare for the holiday together.

## HOW TO PREPARE THE SOCIAL STORY:

Personalization is a big part of this piece! We intentionally left blank spaces for you to make it your own. Write in your own family's plans from your child's perspective and use your child's photo, costume and neighborhood, whenever possible. You can also remove pages that are not applicable. If editing digitally, you can add your photos, maps and text with help from a PDF editor (there are a number of apps that can help with this!).

## HOW TO USE HOPEBRIDGE'S HALLOWEEN SOCIAL STORY:

This social story is easily downloadable and can be printed as a hard copy or digitally viewed on a tablet. Choose an appropriate time to introduce the story, ideally when they seem open to learning. When you begin, read through the story several times and practice over multiple days. Discuss how it relates to your child's real-life experiences. When it comes time to putting these learnings into action, reinforce their expected behaviors with positive feedback.



NOW LET'S GET TO IT ... HEAD TO THE NEXT PAGE TO BEGIN THE SOCIAL STORY:





**Halloween is a holiday that happens once a year.**



**I might see some decorations like pumpkins, witches, or bats.**



**Halloween is on October 31st,  
this year that is a Monday night.**



**I can draw/color what special things I might wear on Halloween.**



**For Caregiver: Write the steps out for Halloween night.**

For Example:

1. Get dressed in a costume and grab candy bag.
2. Pick how many houses/streets to go to.
3. Stay with mom/dad while walking.
4. Ring doorbell and say or have mom/dad say "trick or treat".
5. Ask to eat some candy.
6. Head home and save the rest of the candy.

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**



## HOW HOPEBRIDGE SUPPORTS FAMILIES ON HALLOWEEN & BEYOND

Our Hopebridge Heroes may not wear capes outside of Halloween, but they're here to support your family through these practices, as well as more fundamental goals and life skills.

If your child currently receives therapy at Hopebridge, ask your BCBA or speech therapist for help with your Halloween-related behavior and communication goals.

If your child does not yet attend Hopebridge for therapy, we still want to help! Fill out the quick and easy form at [hopebridge.com/contact](https://hopebridge.com/contact) for autism testing or an ABA therapy evaluation to help your child access even more fun out of life ... both on Halloween and year-round!

