Halloween With an ADHD Child

by ANGELA FINLAY

How to Control the Excitement Without Spoiling the Fun

Candy isn't the only concern when October 31st rolls around. The sheer excitement of the holiday, from costume parties to trick-or-treating, can make for an overwhelming experience. And as a parent of an ADHD child, you know that too much stimulation can be a recipe for irritability, conflict, and trouble.

Fortunately, you won't have to forego the holiday to keep your child on track – there are plenty of ways to participate in the festivities and enjoy the day without going overboard. You'll find that good preparation, clever adjustments, and a bit of lenience can make this Halloween a complete success.

Avoiding Overstimulation on Halloween

Halloween is a holiday for all the senses, and that can cause trouble for some kids with ADHD. The good news is that there's no scientific evidence to show that sugar makes kids more hyperactive or inattentive, so you won't have to hijack the candy bowl. On the other hand, a host of artificial and non-nutritious substances found in junk food might have some negative affect on behaviour (research is so far conflicting), and in the end, too many empty calories certainly won't support balanced and focused behavior.

Limiting treats is obviously an important part of orchestrating an ADHD-friendly Halloween, but consider these techniques that address the sights, sounds, and other overwhelming distractions that the holiday can bring:

- **Host the Halloween party yourself.** This way, you can control the amount of treats on the table, as well as the sights, sounds, and distractions to keep your child happy and engaged.
- **Come up with a code word.** Pick a word or phrase that you child can use when they're feeling overwhelmed or anxious, so you can rescue them from the stressful situation. A few minutes of peace and quiet can be enough to regroup and stay happy.
- **Practice wearing the costume.** It may seem like there's nothing to worry about, but many Halloween costumes are notoriously difficult to wear for hours at a time. Don't force your kid to find out the hard way – have them wear it for stretches in the days leading up to Halloween, so you'll know if the fabric, design, and fit will be safe and comfortable (or whether you might need to choose a new outfit).

Tips to Prepare for a Happier, Healthier Holiday

Some clever preparation will help kids have fun and stay safe without feeling like they're losing out on anything. The idea is to carefully control the amount of excitement and indulgence with balance, substitution, and a bit of extra monitoring.

Start the Day With Healthy Food

Candy is a big part of Halloween; denying your child any and all sweets is sure to end terribly. However, you can

offset the sugar and empty calories with a filling and wholesome breakfast to keep their blood sugar balanced.

Be sure to pack high-fiber fruits and veggies for their snacks, too, and insist that candy is only allowed after all the healthy food has been eaten. Hopefully, a belly full of fresh and filling foods will also deter them from binge eating their treats at the end of the day.

Talk to Your Child's Teacher Before the Class Party

Class Halloween parties are frantic events, and the sensory stimulation can lead to impulsive behaviour. If your kid tends to lose control or make poor decisions when there's too much going on around them, lay some ground rules before the party starts.

Be sure to remind them what the day will be like, and how important it is to pace themselves. Also, talk to their teacher about keeping an extra close eye on your child as the festivities unfold – having an adult monitor candy intake and class interactions can make a big difference.

Map out Your Trick-Or-Treat Route

When there's an entire town to visit, kids are bound to go overboard. Instead of just winging it on Halloween night, pick one or two blocks beforehand. Walk the entire distance rather than driving around to different neighborhoods, since the activity will burn off some energy and slow down the candy collection.

If your child will be disappointed with a two or three street limit, make a fun little treasure map to follow: rather than just going in a straight line, include landmarks to lead them to the next house, and you could ask a friendly neighbor to get in on the fun and read the next clue when the kids get to their door. The children will enjoy the "hunt", and it can make a few streets seem like a lot more.

At the end of the night, the same rules apply for kids with ADHD and those without any sensory sensitivities: be sure to go through their candy supply first, to make sure everything is safe. It's a good idea to put some rules in place regarding how much candy is allowed each day, and dish it out accordingly.