

HALLOWEEN TIPS FOR NEURODIVERGENT FAMILIES



For some autistic individuals, Halloween can be an unpredictable and stressful time. This time of year can cause lots of changes, it might also be confusing and scary, causing sensory overload, general heightened excitement or anxiety. Here are some of our top tips to help:

1. Try to follow normal routines as much as possible.

Halloween can bring lots of changes, so where possible, try to follow your child's normal routine to reduce anxiety and unpredictability. If there's changes to their routine, pre-exempt how you will prepare your child for this. Some children may benefit from the use of visual supports to process any adjustments to their day to day schedule.

2. Use visual aids.

Visual aids will help you to explain Halloween and the activities that you will be doing, in a clear and visual way which may alleviate anxiety. It's good to introduce the subject even a few weeks in advance so they can prepare but we know some young people might prefer shorter notice too.

3. Use Social Stories

Social stories are a great way to prepare autistic young people for what to expect. Sometimes, anxiety can arise from not knowing what is going to happen or what will change. You can download generic Social Stories for free online which you can easily adapt and personalise to meet your child's needs.



4. Rehearse and practice.

Your child may feel more at ease if you practice and role play certain scenarios before hand. If you are going trick or treating with them, you can pre-walk the route for a few days so they know where they will be going and what to expect. You could use soft toys or figures to role play upcoming events.

5. Discuss time frames.

Your child may benefit from being aware of your plans and when they will take place. A schedule can prepare young people for when activities are happening, when it will end, and what they will be doing after. You could use visual timers to show how long each activity will take.

6. Allow for down time/ self regulation prior to events.

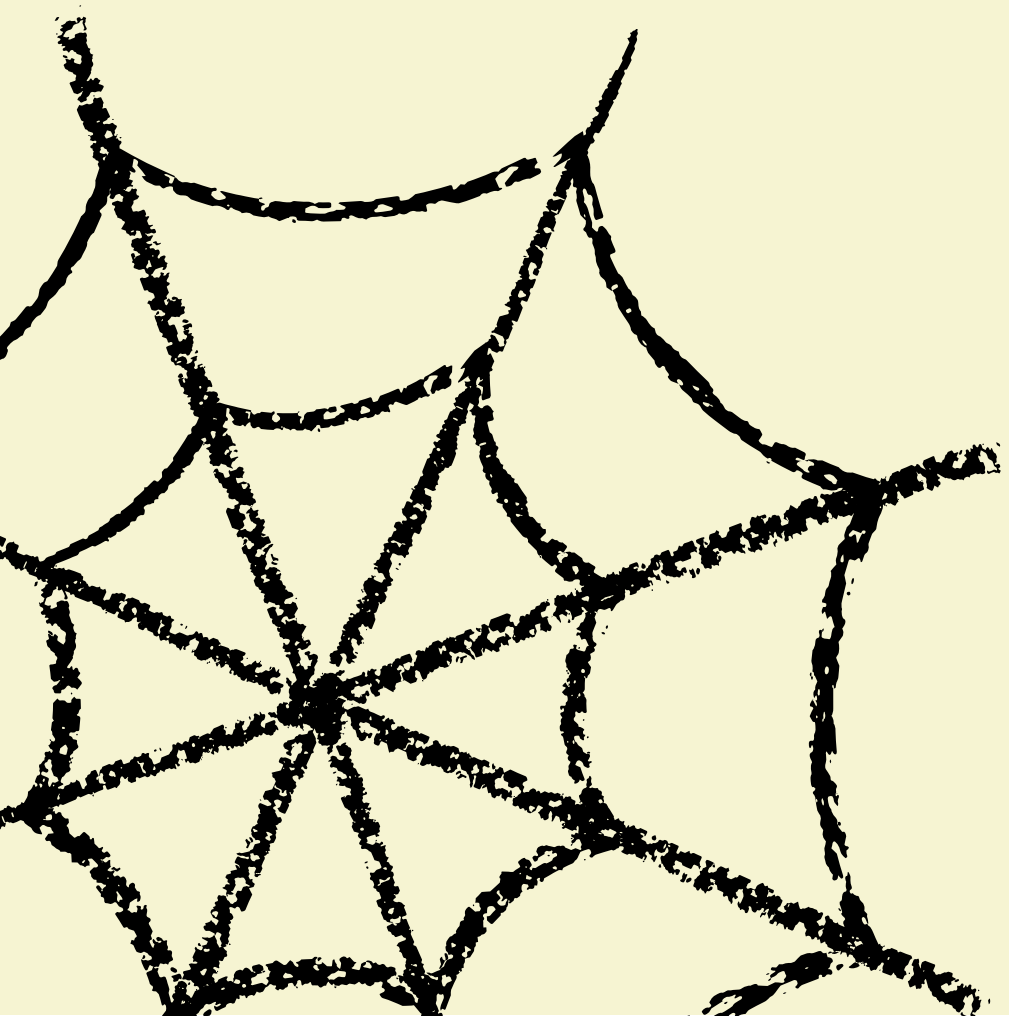
Incorporate some quiet time into your child's day to ensure they can self-regulate and prepare themselves for upcoming activities and after events too.

7. Do things differently.

If your child is anxious about unannounced visitors, you can leave a parent outside to greet trick or treaters, and your child can watch through the window until they decide when and if they want to engage. You could do trick or treat in the house and knock on different doors in the house if your child doesn't feel comfortable going out in the community.

7. Go with your child and work at their level.

There is no 'right way' to celebrate Halloween and each autistic young person will participate in this occasion in their own unique way. Maybe you had planned a whole trick or treat walk, but your child only makes it to three houses, or maybe they couldn't make it out the door at all. There is no such thing as "failing". It's ok to close your door and draw the blinds, or put up signs asking people not to ring the bell if that's what's best for your child and you.



SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS



There are lots of ways that you can support sensory differences around Halloween. Here are some top tips:

1. Use comfortable clothes for a base layer beneath costumes.

Putting a physical barrier between your child's costume and their skin is a great starting point. You can avoid any itchy fabrics or scratchy tags this way. This might also make your child feel more comfortable because they're wearing something they're already familiar with underneath.

2. Remove any tags.

Remove tags on any clothing or costumes to avoid irritation/ sensory discomfort.

3. Choose materials carefully or let your child choose.

Many autistic young people have tactile sensitivities so be sure to consider the fabric of the costume. Let your child feel the fabric against their skin to determine whether they can tolerate it or you could even let your child pick out preferred materials.

4. Practice wearing the costume/outfit prior to the event.

Your child could try on the costume before buying it to make sure they would be comfortable wearing it. They could also wear the outfit in the house to get used to it too.

5. Wash or clean the outfit before it's worn.

If you are buying a costume, then it might be worth washing or cleaning it before it's worn. Many costumes have an unusual smell to them or they might have stiff, scratchy textures. Giving them a wash before Halloween is a way to soften up the fabrics, remove and replace odors, and make them more tolerable.



6. Make sure the outfit is easy to get on and off.

If your child becomes overwhelmed when wearing their costume, they may want to quickly take it off. Try to choose an outfit that is easy to take off.

7. Get a smaller or larger size depending on sensory preference.

If your child finds tight clothing comfortable and calming, consider buying a smaller size costume so it fits a bit snuggly. However, if they hate the feel of tight clothing, then go up a size.

8. Use noise reduction ear muffs as part of the costume.

If your child doesn't like loud/ unexpected noise in their environment then you could incorporate ear defenders into the costume. You can also get ear buds to help in loud environments.

9. Provide other sensory tools like chewelry or fidget toys.

You can incorporate other sensory toys into your child's costume. If your child's costume has a zipper up the front, then you could attach a chewable toy to the zipper pull for your child to chew on. You could also choose a costume that has pockets in so your child can easily store their fidget toys in.

