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## **Keep Halloween Fun and Safe**

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Halloween is fast approaching. Though the holiday derives from old Gaelic celebrations of the new harvest, Halloween today is, above all, a time to celebrate all that is scary. Halloween gives parents an opportunity to help children confront their fears, demystifying everything that goes bump in the night and transforming those things normally considered frightening into something fun.

While we help our children enjoy this time, Halloween can be a scary time for parents. As humorist Dave Barry pointed out in a 2002 column, what we as children once called “a lot of fun” in hindsight looks more like “a very unsafe time.” Barry suggests that, to ensure Halloween safety, “your children should spend Halloween locked inside a windowless room, sedated and wrapped head to toe in reflective tape. If...some neighbor, somehow, manages to actually give one of your children a treat, you must immediately snatch it away and destroy it with a flamethrower.”

While both parents and children should keep Halloween safety constantly in mind, Dave Barry’s approach is a little overdramatic. Halloween should be a fun time for children and need not be an overly stressful time for parents...as long as they remember a few basic safety guidelines.

### **Jack-o’-Lantern Safety**

The carved pumpkin, or jack-o’-lantern, is the symbol perhaps most commonly associated with Halloween. Carving grim jack-o’-lantern faces can be a lot of fun for children and parents alike. However, it’s important to take safety precautions both when carving pumpkins and when placing candle-lit jack-o’-lanterns on display.

As with any activity involving knives or other sharp objects, children must never be allowed to carve pumpkins unsupervised.

According to Dr. Roy A. Meals, “hand surgeons see an increase in what we call ‘pumpkin carver’s finger’ around Halloween.” To avoid pumpkin carving injuries to both children and parents, Dr. Meals advises that kitchen knives not be used. Instead, he recommends using dull, serrated knives like those often

found in carving kits.

When carving pumpkins, it is also important to scoop out the pumpkin's inner walls in advance, and to never work with slippery hands. For young children, painting a pumpkin's surface can be a fun and safe alternative to carving.

Candles add a haunting glow to a carved jack-o'-lantern face. Candle-lit jack-o'-lanterns should be watched carefully and kept away from landings or doorsteps where loose-fitting costumes are likely to brush against the flame. If you choose to put your jack-o'-lantern on an indoor windowsill, be sure to keep it clear of curtains, drapes and other surfaces that could easily catch fire.

### **Keep Costumes Safe**

Another important aspect of staying safe on Halloween is to be conscientious when buying or making a child's Halloween costume.

Parents should make sure that their children's costumes are made from flame resistant fabrics. Costumes should be large enough to be worn over warm clothes but close-fitting enough to minimize the risk of contact with open flames.

Oversized shoes and long, billowy skirts and robes should be avoided to prevent tripping. Magic wands, swords, and other costume props should be made out of flexible materials. Never allow your child to carry sharp or rigid props that might cause an injury in the event of a trip or fall.

Masks can significantly reduce a child's peripheral vision and/or hearing. If possible, use face paint or makeup instead of masks. If your child insists on a mask, make sure it fits properly and cut eye holes large enough to ensure unimpeded vision. Hats, scarves and wigs should also be tied securely to prevent them from slipping over a child's eyes.

Costumes should be colored brightly enough to ensure nighttime visibility. If your child's costume is not already brightly colored, trim it with reflective tape that will glow in a car's headlights.

### **Trick or Treat!**

What would Halloween be without the tradition of trick or treating? But most parents will agree that this activity requires an even greater attention to safety precautions. In fact, the police departments in both Marinette and Menominee cities strongly urge parents to replace door-to-door trick-or-treating with a block party or inside festivities to keep kids safe. If you do go out, they recommend that you start at 4pm and end by 6pm, when it really begins to get dark. Also, keep in mind that children under 12 should always be

accompanied by an adult, and instructed to never go inside a home. Older children without adult supervision should always travel in groups.

Both children and motorists can become distracted by flashy costumes, lawn decorations, and the overall excitement of Halloween night. Help children remember to always take the safest – not the fastest – way from house to house. When crossing the street, cross only in crosswalks and watch out for inattentive or drunk drivers. When going from one house to the next, use the sidewalks to avoid tripping hazards such as lawn ornaments, clotheslines and sprinklers.

Parents should always inspect their children's treats...etc.

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