Safe costumes can prevent Halloween mishaps

Millions of people celebrate Halloween every year. Borrowed or adapted from a few different festivals that once took place in Europe, Halloween has origins in the Roman Feralia festival, the Celtic summer's end festival Samhain, and the Catholic All Saints Day.

Trick-or-treating is a significant part of the Halloween festivities, but for many people, the real delight is choosing a costume. The right costume is not only one that suits the spirit of Halloween, but also one that's safe. The Prevention First Organization says that collisions with cars, eye injuries from sharp objects and burns from flammable costumes account for the most youth emergency room visits on Halloween.

Just how does one create a safe costume? Consider these pointers when preparing for the arrival of October 31.

• Rely on flashlights and reflective tape to make trick-or-treaters more visible during evening walks. The reflective tape can be incorporated right into the costume design.

• Choose hats and face paints in lieu of masks. Masks can block a child's vision and impede a youngster's ability to check for traffic.

• Ensure that costumes do not drag on the floor, as costumes that are too long can pose a tripping hazard.

• Have children wear comfortable, flat shoes to reduce the risk of tripping or falls.

• Make sure children walk on sidewalks and well-lit paths. They also should avoid darting out into the street to run to another home.

• Choose soft, flexible costume props whenever possible. Make sure the props, such as swords, are not sharp or too long.

• Make sure costumes and accessories are made with flame-resistant materials.

• Use glow sticks or battery-powered LED lights instead of lit candles for costumes and decorations.

• Trick-or-treat in groups with other parent chaperones so the adults can be extra diligent in their efforts to keep children safe.

Using face paints instead of masks so kids' visibility is not compromised when trick-or-treating.

Celebrating Halloween at school

Many schools allow children to celebrate Halloween in the classroom. Festivities may include parades, classroom parties or trunk-or-treat fun in the school parking lot.

Creating a safe and festive atmosphere for kids to celebrate Halloween is of the utmost importance for parents and teachers. The following suggestions can help ensure kids enjoy a safe and fun Halloween this year.

Costumes

Expect some restrictions on children's costumes. Schools may request costumes be modest and age-appropriate. Some schools forbid certain costume props, such as swords or guns. For safety purposes, school personnel will want to see children's faces. Therefore, the school may request face paint rather than a mask that obscures a child's face. Schools may provide some Halloween instructions to ensure all students are in compliance and will not be left out.

Food

Schools, teachers and certain classrooms may have specific food limitations to avoid allergy issues. Many kids have peanut, tree nut and/or dairy allergies, so when parents volunteer to send in food for classroom parties, they may have to verify that it does not contain nuts or dairy. Fresh fruits, crackers or allergen-free baked goods make for safe Halloween treats.

Treats

To be fair, if a student plans on handing out a treat or trinket to other classmates, they should first get permission from school staff. Again, allergies can come into play. If goodie bags are allowed, always confirm the number of children in class so that no one feels left out. In a classroom setting, teachers may follow an "all or nothing" philosophy. Unless a child has enough to give out to everyone, he or she may not be permitted to hand out treats.

Safety

Schools today need to be extra diligent in their safety protocol. Visitors usually have to be announced at the front office, and long gone are the days that school doors are kept unlocked. Parents should be informed about how the school plans to handle security for Halloween events. Outdoor parades may be attended by the public, but classroom parties may be restricted to class parents or one or two volunteers. Adults should bring identification and be expected to wear a visitor tag. Students may not be allowed to leave early without prior notification and may need to be signed out through the office when they leave. Confirm any plans with school administrators.

School insurance plans typically cover only active students. As a result, younger siblings may not be allowed to come to classroom parties.

Many schools schedule Halloween fun for their students, and this fun may include parties, parades or assemblies. Those who follow the rules can make Halloween events run more smoothly.

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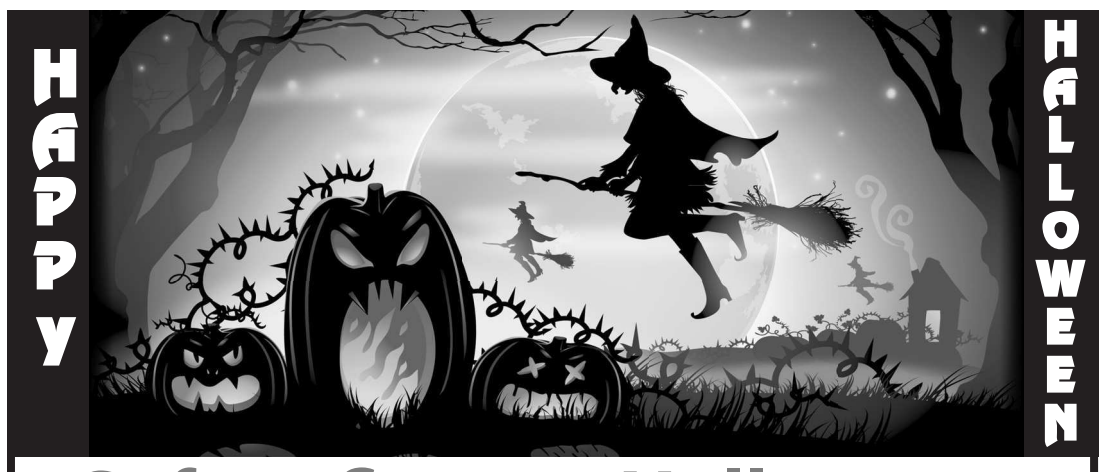

Safety first on Halloween

For kids, few holidays are more anticipated than Halloween. The chance to dress up in costume and patrol the neighborhood with friends while collecting treats is the highlight of many a child's autumn.

For parents, anticipation is replaced by anxiety. While kids are out trick-or-treating, parents may be home or at work hoping their kids are safe and sound. Because Halloween is so popular among kids, it's hard for parents to forbid trick-or-treating. But parents should instruct kids on the following tips to ensure this Halloween is as safe as it is fun.

- Strangers' homes are off limits. Make sure kids know they should never enter the home of a stranger, no matter how friendly or welcoming that stranger may seem.
- There's no going it alone. Kids should not be permitted to go out alone. When trick-or-treating, kids should always be accompanied not only by their friends, but there must be at least one adult chaperone present at all times. Parents should get together several weeks before Halloween to determine who will chaperone, where kids will be trick-or-treating and during what hours.
- Stay close to home. Kids should stay in their own neighborhood and only visit homes of neighbors they know. Advise kids to steer clear of homes whose doors are hidden from street view. Chaperones should accompany kids to the front door if visibility from the street is poor.
- Choose safe costumes. Kids should wear costumes made of light colored material. If a child insists on a favorite costume that uses largely dark material, attach reflective tape to the costume so your favorite reveler is easily visible to motorists during twilight and nighttime hours when it's not always easy for drivers to see.
- No toy guns. Toy guns are just asking for trouble, as many of today's replicas are easily confused with the real thing. Play it safe and choose costumes that aren't accessorized with toy guns.
- Bring a flashlight along. Night falls quickly in late October, so kids and chaperones alike should carry a flashlight to improve their visibility and make them more visible to passing motorists.
- Stick to the sidewalks. Trick-or-treaters should stick to the sidewalks and always cross the street at corners. Don't walk in the street, and never walk between parked cars when crossing the street, as it's especially difficult for motorists to anticipate pedestrians walking or running from behind parked cars into the street.
- Be wary of masks. Many masks restrict a child's vision, so look for one that provides sufficient visibility. If a child's favorite mask is low on visibility, make children agree to remove their mask when crossing the street.

Parents understandably worry when kids go trick-or-treating. But a few simple safety lessons shared with children can ensure everyone gets home safe.

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