

“Trick or Treat,” those familiar words will be said by many children in the upcoming weeks. Growing up in rural Wisconsin we seldom had a trick-or-treater come to our home, and if we did it was a close neighbor or cousin. Since moving to Missouri, and now living in town, I have learned so much more about the art of “Trick or Treat” on Halloween and wanted to share a few safety tips with children, parents, and homeowners.

Most people think of Halloween as a time for fun and treats. However, roughly four times as many children aged 5-14 are killed while walking on Halloween evening compared with other evenings of the year, and falls are a leading cause of injuries among children on Halloween. I don't share this information to scare parents, but rather to make you aware. Many Halloween-related injuries can be prevented through close supervision of children during trick-or-treat activities.

Before you go remember:

- The right costume is the first step in Halloween safety. Choose a costume made of flame retardant material. Be sure that it is short enough so that it does not cause your child to trip and fall. Choose knives, swords and other props should be made of a flexible material, so that they don't pose a hazard if fallen on. Avoid wearing long, baggy, or loose costumes or oversized shoes to prevent tripping.
- Try using face paints instead of a mask, a mask can block clear vision. Be sure that the face paint is nontoxic and hypoallergenic.
- For good visibility, add some reflective tape to the costume or bag they are carrying.
- Attach your child's name, address, and your phone number inside the child's costume in case they get separated from your group.

When you're out remember:

- Go only to well-lit houses and remain on porches rather than entering houses.
- Travel in small groups and be accompanied by an adult.
- Use flashlights, stay on sidewalks, and avoid crossing yards. This is not only for safety reasons, but also common courtesy.
- Stop at all corners and stay together in a group before crossing streets. Be reminded to look left, right, and left again before crossing the street.

For parents accompanying the group:

- As an adult be sure to watch the roads and drive slowly on Halloween for the safety of your children and all children.
- Watch for children in the street and on medians.
- Exit driveways and alleyways carefully.
- Have children get out of cars on the curb side, not on the traffic side.

Things to consider about candy:

- Instruct your children to bring all candy home before eating it so that you can carefully inspect it for tampering. Children shouldn't snack while they're out trick-or-treating, before parents have a chance to inspect the goodies. To help prevent

children from munching, give them a snack or light meal before they go -- don't send them out on an empty stomach.

- Throw out candy or treats that are homemade, unwrapped or if they appear to have been tampered with (pinholes in wrappers, torn wrappers, etc.)

If you are handing out the treats:

- Prepare homes for trick-or-treaters by clearing porches, lawns, and sidewalks and by placing jack-o-lanterns away from doorways and landings.
- Provide treats that are individually wrapped candy or offer kids nonfood treats, such as stickers and erasers.
- Avoid giving choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies, or small toys as treats.

Halloween can be a fun event for children and adults alike. Common sense and planning are the keys to a successful and a safe holiday. I am always happy when I open the door and see children dressed in appropriate costumes with parents in tow. As a homeowner it is even more satisfying to hear the words trick-or-treat and the words thank you with each ring of my doorbell. Safety is important during Halloween, but so is common courtesy. Be involved with your children and help them to stay safe and have fun this holiday season.

The safety tips provided in this article include information from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Safety Council. For more information on this or other youth development related issues please contact the University of Missouri Extension Office at 660-885-5556.