

# A Family Guide to the Proper Care & Safe-keeping of *Goblins*



Little Miranda has donned a princess dress, and Marcus looks just like a superhero. Treat bags in hand, they head out intent on filling them to overflowing. You remember the fun you had rushing from door to door. But today's world is different, one that's simply less safe for children.



You don't like to dwell on it, but there really are "boogie men" out there – people who might try to harm your children. Though small in number, their very existence makes it mandatory for parents and children to be cautious. Additionally, there are a few ill-informed people who hand out unsafe treats or decorate their homes in a way that isn't safe.

Here's some street-smart safety advice to keep your children safe:

- Secure emergency identification (name, address, phone number) discreetly within your child's Halloween attire or on a bracelet. This will come in handy in the unlikely event you become separated from your child.
- An adult should always accompany young children. Children too young for trick-or-treating can stay home, dress up in costume, and help answer the door with a parent or butler nearby.
- If you choose to let your older children (age 12 and up) trick or treat without you, limit them to a familiar neighborhood (yours or a close friend's or relative's) or a shopping mall. Also, make sure they are accompanied by at least one or two other children. Some parents choose to follow along at a distance to keep an eye on their children.

Check for low-flying brooms and other vehicles before crossing the street.

- If you live in a rural area, offer your goblins (and their friends) a ride in the car.
- Plan your older child's route. Together, map out a safe route so you know where they'll be. Remind them not to take short cuts through backyards, alleys, playing fields, or magic forests.
- Set a time limit for children to trick-or-treat.
- Make sure they know how to make an emergency call. Take or send a cell phone along, just in case. If you don't have a cell phone, send your older child out with enough change to make non-emergency phone calls.
- Remind goblins to walk, slither, and sneak (but not run) on sidewalks, and to stay off the street.
- Discourage children from riding bikes, skateboards, or flying carpets while in costume. Costumes can easily be caught in wheels, gears, and pedals.

## More Advice for Trick-or-Treaters:

- Cross the street only at corners. And look both ways before crossing the street to check for cars, trucks, and low-flying brooms.
- Don't hide or cross the street between parked cars or in front of black cats.

Keep your dragon or dog on a leash.

- Wear light-colored or reflective-type clothing so you are more visible – especially if you are wearing a cloaking device.
- Try to get kids to trick-or-treat while it is still light out. Some children begin trick-or-treating in the afternoon. Light or dark – either way, carry a flashlight or two to light your way.
- Keep away from open fires and candles. (Costumes can be extremely flammable.)
- Only visit homes and castles that have the porch light on.
- Watch out for wet leaves on sidewalks, low-hanging decorations, and hoses or electrical cords that might be lying across your path.
- Accept your treats at the door. Don't take treats from people walking down the sidewalk or lurking behind bushes. And never go up to a stranger or into a stranger's house or car.
- Use face paint rather than masks to keep your vision unobstructed.
- Be cautious of animals and other roaming beasts.
- Say "Thank you" after receiving a treat, and bow or curtsy properly.
- Do not eat any treat until after a parent or responsible adult has inspected it for safety.





## Taming the Scare Factor

Halloween tends to bring out a child's interest in blood, gore, and spooky things. In general, dressing up like a pirate, a superhero, or a soldier is harmless. Occasionally, though, a child gets caught up in the persona and displays aggressive behavior. If a costume includes a fake knife, sword, or gun, make sure it does not look real, and that it's made from cardboard or other flexible materials. Better yet, challenge kids to create costumes that don't need "weapons" to be scary or fun.

Besides being a night of ghouls and all things scary, this night is notorious for pranks. Some pranks are annoying but relatively harmless. Others are harmful, and possibly illegal. Let your children know that you disapprove of any trick that will hurt others (physically or emotionally) or vandalize property.

### Think Alternatives

Schools, fire stations, libraries, even malls in many communities organize "haunted houses" and other festivities for families. Instead of going from house to house, take your child through a corn maze or on hayride. Check the events section in your local newspaper or with your local chamber of commerce.

Parents and kids can avoid trick-or-treating entirely by organizing a costume party with treats, games, contests, and music.



### Other ideas include:

- ⊗ Organize a costume parade.
- ⊗ Carve a pumpkin or do a craft.
- ⊗ Read a scary story like *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Irving or *The Raven* by Poe. Younger children might prefer *Squeals and Squiggles and Ghostly Giggles* by Ann McGovern, *Go Away Big Green Monster* by Ed Emberley, or *The Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* by Linda Williams. Your library is a great source for books.
- ⊗ Make a scarecrow.
- ⊗ Make a haunted house for the neighborhood children.
- ⊗ Watch scary movies while drinking hot cider.
- ⊗ Bake pumpkin cookies or pumpkin pie with your kids.
- ⊗ Arrange a visit to a retirement home or senior center.
- ⊗ Create an alliance with college fraternities, sororities or service clubs for children's face painting or a carnival.

## Healthy Haunting!

Lots of children (and lots of used-to-be-children) are in the habit of going out on Halloween and coming back with a big bag of candy that they promptly sort through and begin devouring. A stomachache the morning after is of no concern to most kids!

The American Academy of Pediatrics lists Halloween Safety Tips on its website. Here are two of their recommendations for a healthier Halloween:

1. Encourage your children to eat a good meal before they go trick or treating or go to a party. This will keep them from filling up on too much candy.
2. Encourage your neighbors to hand out non-food treats such as coloring books, pens and pencils.

The truth is that there isn't much that is "healthy" for children in a Halloween bag loaded with candy. But who wants to be the one to spoil a fun time where candy is the norm? Help your children achieve a balance by setting reasonable limits. It can help them avoid excess during the holiday. And you'll be teaching them skills they could apply to other areas of their life as well.

### Healthy Halloween ideas include:

- ⊗ Before your children go trick or treating, set a limit on the amount of candy that they can consume. After they've eaten the limit, store the candy bag in the kitchen. This will help you control their snacking.
- ⊗ Sort through your children's bags of candy and throw away items that are higher in fat and sugar content.
- ⊗ Encourage other parents on the block to offer treats that are lower in fat and sugar and higher in nutrient content, such as fruit leather (look for organic products that are 100% fruit with the least amount of calories). Also try not to hand out candy in excess. Limit the number of treats you give to one or two items per child.
- ⊗ At Halloween parties, serve healthy snacks such as fruit kabobs, vegetables with dip, and fruit juice boxes instead of potato chips and pop.
- ⊗ Have your children agree that they'll "trade" their candy for healthy treats when they get home, such as whole-grain or fruit muffins and wholesome candies or cookies from the health-food store.
- ⊗ Don't let your children have candy right before bedtime, and insist that they brush and floss their teeth.

Whatever you decide to do, make your Halloween activity a treat your little goblins will enjoy!

Sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration; American Red Cross; Crime Prevention Association of Michigan; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

