Sensory-Friendly Fall Activities & Halloween Celebrations

Contributed by Kristi Jordan, OTR/L

For those who participate in fall activities and Halloween celebrations, such as choosing costumes, trick-or-treating, enjoying treats, and attending parties or events, it is important to remember to plan ahead for social, communication, and sensory issues that may occur.

Choosing Sensory-Friendly Costumes

It is that time of year when individuals and families begin to look for costumes for Halloween and fall/autumn costume parties and activities. Individuals with sensory issues may choose to plan carefully and consider fabrics, makeup, wigs, and props that do not irritate or provide too much sensory input.

Some simple and practical strategies are:

- Use comfortable clothes as a base for costumes.
- Experiment with accessories and makeup before the big event.
- Have a backup plan. Don’t force an uncomfortable costume, if it is not tolerated. A simple character t-shirt may have to suffice. Avoid unnecessary sensory triggers, such as uncomfortable masks and make up paint if a known tactile sensitivity exists.
- Provide needed sensory input before the event to prepare and after the event to calm, such as brushing or deep pressure or a warm bath.
- Consider individual interests and choices when planning (favorite characters, movies, etc.) and provide communication assistance in making choices, as needed (visuals or VOCA).
- Be reasonable with the time frame. Whether trick-or-treating or going to an event or party, recognize and respect individual limits and triggers, monitor behavior and sensory responses, and adjust plans accordingly.
- Use social narratives and strategies to explain purposes of a costume and costume etiquette.
- Prepare individuals for changes in schedule, plan, or activities.

Some sensory-friendly costume ideas:


Autism Society of America Tips: