

Don't Be in the Dark about HALLOWEEN *Safety!*

By Taslim Jaffer

Even with witches, vampires and skeletons lurking in darkened street corners, the most frightening part about Halloween is the number of preventable accidents that occur each year. It is never too soon to start talking to your children about how they can be safe on this night of tricks and treats.

Here are some easy tips to adhere to before, during and after Halloween festivities:

BEFORE HALLOWEEN NIGHT:

- Teach your children how to cross the street safely. You can do this from toddlerhood and reinforce this as your children grow. According to Safe Kids Canada, children under the age of nine do not have the developmental ability to cross the street safely on their own, so it is especially important that on the Halloween night, children under this age be accompanied by an adult or a reliable older child. What *is* the safest way to cross the road? I remember being taught to look left, then right, then left again. This still holds true. Kids also need to learn to use their ears when crossing the road; ask them if they can hear any cars coming. Once you see that they understand how to use their eyes and ears to cross the road, it's helpful to come up with a quick catch phrase that you can use as a caution before they cross the street with you. Try "look and listen!" to remind them that they need to do both before they can safely cross. Before going out on Halloween, remind them that the same rules apply even though the streets look different. If your children are older and have been crossing the street on their own, it's a good idea to remind them of this, as well. You may have to deal with rolled eyes and exasperated looks, but they may be the words that your child remembers when out that night.
- We have all seen it happen. A child darts out onto the street from between two parked cars and time stops for a second as the driver hits the brakes. When teaching your children how to safely cross the street, show them the best places from which to cross — at crosswalks or street corners. In general, these parts of the street are lit and are free from objects that may obstruct your child from a driver's view.
- Halloween night means Jack-o-lanterns perched on steps and at doorways. Make sure your child's costume is flame-retardant before you purchase it. As an added safety precaution, ensure your child knows how to stop, drop and roll just in case his/her costume does catch fire.

WHILE TRICK-OR-TREATING:

- Stay on sidewalks. It sounds like a no-brainer, but it can be easy to get caught up with the celebratory atmosphere and

forget that the roads still belong to cars on Halloween. If there are no sidewalks available between houses and you must use the road, it is best to walk *facing* oncoming cars so that the drivers can see you.

- Don't run! Your children may be anxious to get to the next house, but running only poses the risk of them tripping over their costume or accidentally knocking into someone else sharing the walkways. Give yourself enough time to visit plenty of houses before it is time to head back home.
- If you know you are going to be taking your children trick-or-treating in areas that are not well lit, take a flashlight along with you. Never allow your children to go out alone in areas that are not properly lit.
- From the end of September, kids will be asking each other what they are going to be for Halloween. Whatever the character your child chooses, be sure that it is bright. If a dark cape and dark pants are unavoidable, compromise by sticking reflector tape on the back and sides. Also, ditch the mask for bright face paints. A mask will only hinder your child's vision.
- Refrain from allowing your child to eat his/her treats along the way. Wait until you are home and can inspect the candy carefully under better lighting. Besides, the last thing you need to add to a dark night and excited children is a tummy full of sugar.

AFTER COMING HOME:

- Sort through your child's loot and discard any candy or chocolate that looks like it may have been previously opened, or like it has been punctured. Toss the homemade goodies.
- Hard candy is a choking hazard for young children. If your child cannot safely eat hard candy, discard it immediately.
- Discuss a comfortable candy-consumption schedule with your children; ask them for their input and make the final decision on how much candy is acceptable to eat within a given amount of time.

Safety is one thing that is often overlooked on this thrilling night; politeness is another. Answering the door and handing out candy to children is even more satisfying when the words "thank you!" emerge from painted lips and eye contact is made. And let's leave our neighbours' flowerbeds intact. We can save neighbourly relations that way, too.

Enjoy this much-anticipated night and do it with these tips in mind!

For more everyday safety tips visit: Safe Kids Canada <http://www.safekidscanada.ca/>