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## Helping Children Celebrate Halloween: Tips for Parents and Families

**Arlington, Va.** – Costumes, jack-o-lanterns, and candy! These are all thoughts that come to mind when parents and children think of Halloween. But this festive fall event can be truly scary for some kids, especially young children or those who have had previous traumatic or frightening experiences. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) would like to offer some tips for helping children enjoy the holiday.

“Witches, monsters and ghosts can all seem real to young children,” says David Fassler, M.D., a board certified child and adolescent psychiatrist and APA Trustee-at-large. “Images of blood, death or dismemberment can also trigger fears and anxieties.”

There are a number of things parents can do to help make Halloween a safe and enjoyable experience for children. These include:

1. Take your child’s fears and concerns seriously. Don’t minimize or trivialize them.
2. Help children distinguish between fantasy and reality. Reassure them that the scary images they see are not real, and that you’ll keep them safe.
3. Let kids participate in picking out their costume. Don’t push them to choose something scary or frightening if that’s not what they want to wear.
4. Escort young children to the door to hand out or collect candy.
5. If children are frightened by trick-or-treaters, let them participate from a safe distance. For example, they may not want to go to the door to greet the werewolf, although they may be quite willing to watch through a window.
6. Talk with your children before you let them see scary movies or visit haunted houses to gauge how well they will handle these situations. If they seem apprehensive, don’t let them participate.

Children with pre-existing fears or phobias and those who’ve had personal experiences with death or trauma may be particularly vulnerable to anxiety in conjunction with Halloween events. Fortunately, children are also generally resilient and most can and do enjoy the holiday. However, thoughtful preparation and responses on the part of parents can help minimize stress and ensure a positive experience.

**About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org) and [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

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