Celebrating Halloween with an Adopted or Foster Child

From ToHaveHope.com

If you’ve been to your neighborhood big box store lately, you know it’s coming.

Aisles of candy. Aisles of costumes...from the cute ones to the scary, gory ones. Aisles of decorations. Halloween is just around the corner.

As parents of adopted and foster kiddos, you know holidays are times you need to be intentional. Halloween is one where you REALLY need to be intentional. Adopted and foster kiddos have been impacted by trauma...and the bottom line is TRAUMA and Halloween do not go well together.

First, we have to come to the understanding that Adopted and Foster kiddos have been impacted by trauma. And children who’ve been impacted by trauma don’t manage anxiety well. They don’t manage transitions well. They don’t manage sensory stimuli very well.

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Adoption Month Is Approaching

From News from NACAC

As November approaches, the Children's Bureau, along with AdoptUSKids and the Child Welfare Information Gateway, has launched the 2019 National Adoption Month website.

This year’s National Adoption Month theme is Youth Voices: Why Family Matters. The site includes resources and tips to help people in the field of child welfare ensure youth are heard and respected in all permanency planning efforts. Additional resources (including several from NACAC) are available for young people and youth leaders.

Applications Being Accepted for Foster Youth Interns

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) Foster Youth Intern Program is a competitive, highly esteemed congressional internship for students and recent graduates who spent significant time in foster care. Selected interns will be placed in the Washington, D.C. offices of Members of Congress from May 25 - July 31, 2020 and the candidate must be available for the entirety of the program to qualify. Interns receive a weekly stipend and housing during their assignment in Washington, D.C.

Applications are being accepted through January 8.
Enjoying Halloween With Sensory Challenges

From the American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

Between 5% and 15% of children in the general population demonstrate difficulties with sensory processing—the interpretation of and response to sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and perception of movement and position.

If you are the parent, relative, educator, or friend of one of these children, you know that modifying the activities and the environment can help them enjoy an activity and manage their challenges. But how do you adapt the environment and activities so children can live life to its fullest on Halloween? The following tips are from pediatric occupational therapy practitioners who have experience with addressing sensory challenges.

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<th>If you would like to:</th>
<th>Consider these activity tips:</th>
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<td>Help your child know what to expect.</td>
<td>Prepare your child for the holiday by discussing some of the associated traditions and activities. Read a book, create a story, or role play. Many Halloween traditions clash with established rules, like taking candy from strangers. To help your child understand what Halloween is—and is not—review your values and establish rules and boundaries.</td>
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<td>Have your child wear a costume.</td>
<td>Remember that “pretend” does not necessarily involve elaborate costuming. For example, a simple green shirt may suffice to indicate a turtle. Before shopping, discuss costume guidelines so your child's expectations are clear. Be sure costumes aren't too scratchy, tight, slippery, or stiff. Test your child's comfort when walking, reaching, and sitting. Costumes that are too long or too loose pose tripping and fire hazards. Consider whether your child will be too warm or too cold in character, and whether he or she will also need a coat. If your child has facial sensitivity, avoid make-up and masks. Masks can also occlude vision.</td>
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<td>Take your child trick or treating.</td>
<td>Trick or treating is not mandatory: Meaningful participation in Halloween festivities could include helping to roast pumpkin seeds or picking apples. Choose activities that best fit your child's sensory needs. If you want to try trick or treating, focus on a quiet street with sidewalks. Trick or treating while it's still light out helps to reduce anxiety and increase safety. Practice the sequence of walking to the door, saying “trick or treat,” putting the treat in the bag, and saying “thank you.” If possible, go only to homes of family and friends to keep the comfort level high. Skip homes with flashing lights, loud noises, and scary decorations. Eating candy while trick or treating can be a choking hazard or trigger allergies, so review ground rules before leaving home. Often, children enjoy handing out candy as much as receiving it.</td>
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<td>Have your child participate in a party.</td>
<td>At Halloween parties, some children enjoy wet or sticky textures like pumpkin filling and skinless grapes, whereas these make others feel uncomfortable and even nauseous. Instead of carving a pumpkin, decorate a jack o’lantern with stickers and markers. A child who won’t enjoy bobbing for apples can put the apples in a bucket. Consider planning an event at home with a few friends. Small groups present an opportunity to socialize. A short, successful outing is always preferable to a longer stay that leads to a “meltdown.”</td>
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<td>Help your child avoid a meltdown.</td>
<td>Limit the duration and number of people and activities. Give your child choices and advance notice of the sequence of events. Help your child learn to advocate by practicing phrases like “when is my turn?” or “please don’t touch me.” Know when to stop or disengage from the festivities by recognizing sensory overload—fatigue, hyper excitability, crying, combativeness, etc.—and immediately go to a quieter, smaller space.</td>
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