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Protecting Kids First! A Safe Halloween-Five Tips Parents Should Know

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It's that time of year again. Pumpkins, apple cider, autumn leaves — and — trick or treating! Halloween should be a fun-filled day and night for children. Parents should take precautions to make sure that their little goblins and princesses have a fantastic time. It's one of my favorite nights of the year. I'm stockpiling my treats already!

The costumes — make sure that they are flame retardant. To avoid a tripping hazard, keep the length a bit above the ankles. If your child is carrying wands, swords or other accessories make sure that they are soft and flexible with no sharp points. For little ones, choose brightly colored costumes that stand out, you'll also be able to recognize your child easier if they are with a group. I also recommend putting reflective tape or glow in the dark stickers on the costume and on the goodie bag. Finally, sexually provocative or violent/gory costumes are inappropriate for a child; let's protect their innocence as long as possible.

The candy — No munching allowed until Mom or Dad check the candy out at home. Choking hazards abound for young children. Hard candy, gum, or small toys with removable parts shouldn't be given to children under the age of four. Don't give it out from your home and make sure you check your child's bag to remove anything that can block their airway. If a child has allergies, make sure you remove any suspect candy. You can substitute it with something they can eat. Buy their favorite treats to exchange for any treats you need to take away. I always keep bags of pretzels, fruit rolls and chips on-hand for children who can't have nuts or chocolate.

Ring the doorbell — Please make sure that your child knows NEVER to enter an unknown home or apartment without a parent on Halloween — or at any other time. Children should ring the bell, step back, yell "trick or treat" and then let the adult come forward and put the candy in the bag. After a big

“thank you”, move along. Kids are trusting. They need to know that they can only enter the home of a friend, never the home of a stranger. Another word of caution, if you are handing out the candy, make sure that it is children that are knocking on your door. You don’t want to let a perpetrator gain access to you and your home. Look out the window or peephole before opening the door.

Know the rules of the road — Unfortunately, children get hurt, usually by traffic accidents, on this fun night. Teach your child basic traffic safety rules before leaving your home. They need to look both ways before crossing the street. Make sure they do not dart out from in between cars; they should always cross at corners. Children should not be listening to ipods or walkmans that can distract them or, wearing masks that hamper their vision. I think face paint is a great alternative to a mask. Children are prone to running too, slow them down, assure them that the candy will be waiting. All children under the age of 12 should be supervised.

Prepare for unexpected events — Carry a cell phone and a flashlight. I also recommend that you write your child’s name, address and phone number on a name tag and put it on their costume in case they get lost. Carry an epi-pen if your child has allergies. Have a conversation with your child about all safety issues before they leave home so they will have a Happy Halloween!

For more information on keeping children safe, visit The NYSPCC’s website, www.nyspcc.org