

TAKING TIME

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'Tis the season for ghouls, ghosts and goblins. As adults we may take great delight in creating costumes, planning parties, and anticipating the adventures our children will experience as we celebrate Halloween.

But in some ways, this may be more of an adult holiday than we imagine. In fact, parents should really take thoughtful caution with younger children. Have you ever slaved long nights to create this perfect homemade costume for your three-year-old only to have her scream with fear as you put the disguising hat on?

Children's fears are not to be minimized. And parents should know that for younger children, Halloween activities may be

unpleasant if not planned carefully.

Children experience three types of fears — inborn fears, age-related fears, and fears from traumatic experiences. As a parent, you may be comforted to know that many of your children's fears are quite normal for their ages. For instance, it is expected that:

- many 7-8 month olds will begin to fear strangers.
- many 2-year-olds will fear changes in familiar things (a mother's new haircut, a father's new beard or glasses); they also fear animals and other large objects.
- many 3- to 5-year-olds will fear the dark, masks, and imagin-

ary monsters. They may also fear wild animals and strange noises.

- many 5-year-olds fear physical harm like getting hurt from a ball or bitten by an animal
- many 6-year-olds fear that others will hurt them. They fear ugly noises, ghosts, witches.
- many 6- to 11-year olds fear ridicule and rejection.

Age-related fears disappear if treated by adults with understanding and support. But by just reviewing this list, you can see how children might be less-than-thrilled about participating in Halloween parties and traditions.

If you are a parent, take time this week to consider your child's very normal fears and work around them. Here are a few important tips:

- Don't punish your child for being fearful. This only adds a fear of rejection or pain to his other fear.
- Don't over-protect. This gives your child a sense that she can't take care of herself.

• Instead, ask a child "Tell me what you afraid of."

• Don't force contact. In some cases, a parent can take away fear by turning on a light, removing a mask, or snuggling a child in the presence of a scary, costumed person.

• In advance, talk with your child about the gathering or the trick-or-treating experience. You may want to "play" the event in advance. Read picture books that show how children can make costumes and dress up and look different and yet still be a child inside.

• Play "what if...". Ask your child, "If we are walking up to Uncle Jim's porch, and you see a scary person, what can you do?"

This allows your son or daughter to think about handling the fear. He could hold your hand, walk on the other side of the yard, say "stay away from me," or other things. This allows your child to feel some control.

Halloween can be a time for children to pretend and celebrate. But unfortunately, it can also be a time of increased fear. As the time approaches, carefully consider the situations your children will face. Are there any that will prey on their normal fears? Are they necessary? Can you prepare your child for some of the unusual sights? Making this an enjoyable experience for both adults and children is a matter of taking time.

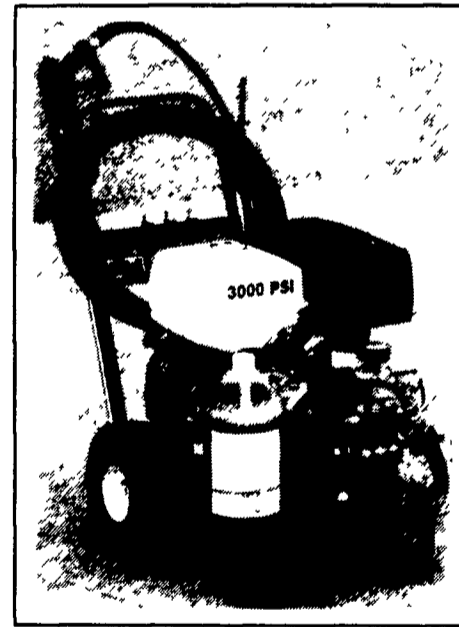
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