

Accepting the Spectrum

A monthly newsletter sharing information and support to families, caregivers and friends of children on the Autism Spectrum

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October is a month filled with loud, scary noises, spooky costumes, and often flashing lights. Although October is a fun filled month filled with a variety of fall activities including pumpkin patches, apple picking, and trick-or-treating, these activities and going out on Halloween night can be overwhelming for some children with autism. Here are some tips to help your child prepare for Halloween and other activities that may occur throughout this month.

- Have a Halloween dress rehearsal. This is a great way for your child to become comfortable with the costume that they will be wearing during Halloween night. Some costumes feel different than typical normal clothing as textures of costumes may feel uncomfortable due to wearing tight or too loose of fabric. Additionally, it is a great idea to review with your child what to expect during Halloween night. This might include practicing knocking on your front door and reminding your child that some Halloween decorations might look scary but they are just pretend.
- Take noise-cancelling headphones, or ear plugs with you when you go trick-or-treating with your child. On Halloween night, there are many loud and spooky noises. Having these items with you can help your child to be more comfortable when trick-or-treating.
- Practice with your child! Check in with your town or other local events that may have a trunk-or-treat event nearby. This is a great way for your child to become familiar with what is to be expected on Halloween night when trick-or-treating.



Additional fall activities that you and your child can do together:



- Visit a pumpkin patch and then decorate the pumpkin! This is a great activity that can promote creativity but also incorporates fine motor skills when painting the pumpkin.
- Create a fall sensory bin! You can use common household items such as rice or beans, and add fall items such as leaves, mini pumpkins, and any other fall-themed item your child would like to include. This is a great way to become familiar with a variety of different textures in the sensory bin.



Lisa's Coaching Corner:

For the last four months, I've been jolted awake by the sounds of heavy machinery excavating the earth in front of my apartment complex. A new daycare center is being erected, but there was no evidence of this for months. Just loud machines moving dirt from one pile to another. Then one night, I came home to find the skeleton of a building, as if it had sprung up out of thin air. From nothing happening to the clear outline of a new school. The similarity to autism parenting struck me.

The days, weeks, even years of tirelessly working with Ben to develop "basic" skills, only to feel like we were treading in quicksand. No visible progress, just the daily grind.

But then, just when I'd start to believe the worst, Ben would take my breath away:

- 🗣️ Verbally expressing his feelings
- 😄 Reading without tears
- 🧠 Hearing the word "no" without losing his mind.

These quantum leaps in development seemed to materialize out of nowhere. But they hadn't — they were built on a bedrock grit and grind - mine and his.
The same goes for you.

Think of one thing your child can do now that they could not / did not do 6 months ago.

- ✓ Maybe it's learning to type or use an AAC device to tell you how they are feeling
- ✓ Maybe it's using utensils or sitting at the dinner table for an entire meal
- ✓ Maybe it's using a coping strategy to self-soothe instead of relying on you

Whatever it is - the skill did not materialize out of thin air.

Rather, those skills are the RESULT of:

- ➡ Every strategy you tried
- ➡ Every comfort zone you challenged
- ➡ Every time you failed and tried again

Remind yourself of this the next time you find yourself caught in the catastrophic thinking.

Otherwise, you risk stalling or sabotaging all of the unseen progress you and your child are making. That's because when you get caught in the "nothing is working" mindset, you're more likely to feel discouraged, struggle to take action, and fail ahead of time. This is why it's SO IMPORTANT to remind yourself that progress is not always visible.

It's happening, even when you can't see it, even when it's not as much as you want, even when it's not as quickly as you'd like. The key is to not give up. Remember this on the days when it feels like all you're doing is lugging dirt from one pile to another. This consistency—showing up day after day, even when progress seems slow—is how you go from piles of dirt to a finished building.

XOXO,

Lisa

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