

HALLOWEEN HACKS:

MAKE OCTOBER 31ST SUCCESSFUL FOR YOUR SPECIAL TRICK-OR-TREATER!

COSTUME:

▪ Making the costume more comfortable:

- **Length** – Look to make sure it's not going to be a tripping hazard.
- **Size** – Since most costumes are generic in size have your child try it on to make sure it's not too big or small so s/he isn't bothered by it all night.
- **Prewash** – Some costumes have funny smells. If it allows, try to wash or clean the costume. If your child like a specific scent, you can spray a very small amount on the middle area so it's not too aromatic. *Hint: You can try spraying a small amount of a calming scent such as lavender or vanilla to help with getting overstimulated.
- **Easy on/off** – Can your child get the costume on and off by him/herself? If your child gets easily overstimulated or frustrated by fabric or overheated, make sure the costume can be taken off quickly and without adult assistance.
- **Weather** – What will the weather be like? It's generally still fairly warm in the LKN area around Halloween. Will your child get too hot in the costume? Masks and heavier costumes don't allow for much air circulation.



As you can see, my son started with a full ninja costume, including



About 15 minutes into trick-or-treating the mask and ninja cuffs were already off because it was too hot and difficult to see.

- **Mask or face paint?** – It can be very challenging for a child with sensory sensitivities to wear a mask or face paint. Many masks can have a funny smell to them and depending on what your child ate or if s/he has recently brushed their teeth, it can get pretty funky inside that mask. Face paints can also have a funny smell, but certain face paints can have a slimy texture or feel itchy. If your child does not seem to tolerate either, find a costume that doesn't require anything special on the face (i.e. farmer, ballerina, etc.).



Here, my son wore the face paint throughout the whole Halloween event; however, it was easy to see on his face and through his stiff movements he was not comfortable. He said the paint smelled weird and he was so worried about getting paint on things he couldn't enjoy himself fully.

- **Tags** – If your child avoids tags already, remove the tags.
- **Comfortable clothes** – You can purchase the costume big enough to wear some comfortable clothes underneath so you don't have to worry about the texture of the costume.
- **Altering the costume** – You can add pieces of fabric to plastic parts of the costume (i.e. helmet, shield attached to arm) by hot gluing the fabric to the plastic piece. This will make the item not feel as cold and more comfortable on the skin. For a helmet or itchy hat (i.e. straw farmer's hat), you can put a smaller beanie-type hat under the rough texture.

- **Accessories:**
 - **Lights** – Pay attention to whether anything lights up or flashes, like a necklace. It can be very distracting and too much light.
 - **Hair/fur** – Keep in mind if a costume has hair from a beard or fur from something like Chewbacca in Star Wars, this can be very itchy or if it lightly rubs on skin it can be noxious and feel like bugs crawling on your skin.
 - **Weapons/big items** – If your child has difficulty with body or spatial awareness, a long sword or walking stick may find their way into bushes, tripping people, accidentally hitting people when turning around. They can also be used as intended and become a small battle on your trick-or-treat walk. Also, if your child has big shoes, large costume piece or a blow up costume (i.e. clown shoes, blow up dinosaur, or is going as a giant slice of pizza) these type of items can easily trip someone, get caught in trees or bushes, be difficult to get in/out of a car, difficult to maneuver through a doorway or hall.
 - **Noise cancelling headphones** – If your child is sensitive to noise, try working some headphones into the costume. (i.e. a bee can have some antennae attached to the headphones, add stripes to the headphones to make tiger ears, use the headphones to be a radio DJ). *Tip: You don't need to ruin the headphones. Use some washable paint to make the stripes on the headphones.

- **Providing sensory input:**
 - **Fidgets (Tactile)** – If the costume has a pocket your child can store the fidgets in the pocket and pull them out as needed. Some costumes can come with fidgets built into them (i.e. a unicorn might have sequins that can be pushed back and forth, a magician could have a beard for rubbing in the hands, a ninja could have "throwing stars" that are actually fidget spinners).
 - **Proprioception** – If you buy the costume large enough your child can wear a weighted or compression vest underneath. If you choose a costume with a "built-in" need for a backpack it can be a weighted backpack (i.e. a ghostbuster can have the proton energy pack filled with rice, a bumblebee can have a weighted backpack as the center of the wings). Your child can also walk with a candy bucket or bag partly filled with candy or another weighted item to carry around for some heavy work. You can also add movement into your character for more input (i.e. a dinosaur can stomp really heavy, a ballerina can go up and down on her toes, Spiderman can try to "fling a web" and jump to the next spot, or a cowboy can gallop like on a horse).
 - **Vestibular** – This can be a little trickier. If you try to fit this type of sensory input into a costume it will be movement such as spinning, swaying, or swinging most likely. For example, a ballerina can spin around, a butterfly can "flutter" back and forth, and a gymnast can tumble).

- **Be prepared:**
 - **PRACTICE wearing the costume!** – Let your child wear it to dinner, or to play for 20-30 minutes. Make sure you have tried the make-up, mask, or helmet before trick-or-treat time. Find out if anything is bothering your child or if you can make adjustments. Make sure s/he can walk in the big shoes, or doesn't get itchy with the face paint. Taking face paint off right before going out on Halloween can take a while and some can temporarily stain skin. You don't want to have a partly green ballerina with watery eyes from a make-up reaction because she wanted to go as Yoda.
 - **Have a back-up!** – Even if you practiced in the clothes, the weather may have changed or someone else might be the same character and if your child doesn't handle change well, you might want another option just in case. This can be a costume to wear instead or regular clothes that you make look like someone in a television show or a book your child likes.
 - **T-shirt** – If all else fails or if your child does not like any costume no matter what you've tried, get a fun holiday themed shirt or a character shirt like Captain America or Wonder Woman. No one says you have to accessorize or wear a costume from head to toe. This should be a night your child can have fun and one you should not have to stress over.

HOUSE-TO-HOUSE:

- **Travel** – Some kids have low tone, strength, or endurance. Some kids just don't like walking and would rather people come over and drop something in their goody bag. Some kids are just too young and get tired very quickly, especially at this time of day.
 - **Scooter or Bicycle** – If your child is old enough, allow a scooter or bicycle to get from house to house. This can pose a problem if s/he decides it's too much work putting the bike on the kickstand and coming back to get back on the bike after each house or if there are a lot of hills in your neighborhood. Practice going and stopping at multiple house before going trick-or-treating. This doesn't mean your child has to go clear up to each door, but you can go on a walk and have your child stop at the sidewalk in front of the house and go through the routine to make sure s/he will be able to handle it all night.
 - **Wagon** – This can work especially well for younger children. Try outfitting a wagon to coordinate with your child's costume. For instance, a farmer can have the wagon made to look like the farm, a shark could have the wagon looking like an aquarium, a Transformer could have the wagon look like the car/truck it transforms into. You will be pulling your child around all night, but you won't hear as much of the complaining as you would if s/he was being made to walk. *Tip: Make sure you leave an area open so your child can easily get in and out of the wagon, otherwise you'll be lifting him/her up and over the sides all night.
 - **Trunk-or-Treat** – If you don't think any of these will help make your trick-or-treating experience a positive one, you can find a local trunk-or-treat (generally put on by local businesses or churches). Trunk-or-treats are great for still get to sport a costume and receive goodies; but in a short period of time, smaller area to limit the amount of walking and often held during the day.



We used cardboard boxes to fashion a train for our little conductor. We kept an opening in the back for him to easily get in and out of the "train". Space under the "smoke stack" served as an area for him to keep some toys or fidgets.