

Halloween can be a tricky time for food and body conversations with kids. So. Much. Candy! The costumes that seem to rely on body shapes and sizes! EEK! But these conversations don't need to be spooky.

This guide is to give you tips and tools to navigate these conversations with confidence - so you and the kids you care about can focus on the delights of the season.

SPOOKY HALLOWEEN PHRASES & NOT-SO-SPOOKY SWAPS

"You can't have any more candy because you've already had a lot and it is too much sugar."



Candy is not on the menu tonight.

WHAT TO SAY TIP:

Worried about your child's body image or relationship with food?

Trust your instincts. Early intervention is key in eating disorder recovery. Check our [list of warning signs and resources](#), and don't hesitate to contact your child's doctor or The National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline at 866-662-1235.

Kids might eat candy all night if allowed, and who can blame them? As the parent, you are there to guide your child in their food choices and it's okay (and necessary!) to set limits without placing any morality on what or how much they're eating.

Movement is vital for your child's health, but linking exercise to "making up" for calories or "earning" food can foster unhealthy habits. Encourage physical activity without tying it to eating. physical activity without tying it to eating.

Let's go move our bodies!"

We ate a lot of sweets tonight, let's go move our bodies to burn off some of those calories!"



You look so pretty in that costume!



What a thoughtful/creative costume!

Commenting on bodies, even positively, can make kids focus too much on appearance and lead to harmful behaviors like dieting. Instead of praising looks, focus on their qualities or express how much you appreciate them for who they are, regardless of appearance or performance.

WHAT TO SAY TIP:

Avoid commenting on your child's body—or your own. Kids mimic your behavior, so if you're worried about weight, they might be too. If Halloween costumes trigger body insecurities, that's okay! Set a positive example by avoiding negative talk about your body and reminding them that our worth isn't linked to size or shape.

HALLOWEEN Q&A WITH COMMUNITY EXPERTS



For Pre-K Kids

My toddler gets super hyper if he's had too much candy – how do I limit his candy without causing shame?"

Kristen Ludwig, RDN, CD-N, CPT
@nourishing.strong.families

A big part of navigating food/eating during the toddler years is using neutral language about it. If you'd like to stop giving your child more of a certain food (such as candy), you can say "That's all the candy we're having today, we can have more tomorrow." This is a neutral statement about candy instead of saying "No more sugar for you! It's so bad!" Labeling food as "good" or "bad" confuses children and sends a message that they are a bad person if they like a certain food. That mindset gets carried into adulthood where food guilt can become a major issue that results in disordered eating and eating disorders.

Dr. Kelly Fradin, MD
@AdviceIGiveMyFriends

Redirection can be a great tactic. "Let's have a bit more candy then go outside to play, would you like one more piece or two more?"

Alex Turnbull, RDN
@TheFamilyNutritionist

As the adult you get to decide the what, where and when food is available and your child gets to decide if and how much they eat from what you offered. Unfortunately, there's no quick fix here. It would be easy just to limit how much they get every time, but that can ultimately leave them wanting more. Try minimizing the overall obsession over candy and other sweets by casually offering it throughout your meals and snacks within the week. The more we neutralize foods that our children truly enjoy, the less they may be desired.

"I've heard it's harmful to talk about foods as "bad" or "unhealthy" but I know it's true that some foods simply are not healthy or good for kids! How do I talk about less nutritious foods with my kids?"

For Elementary Kids

WHAT TO SAY:

Instead of focusing on whether a food is "healthy" or "unhealthy," focus on what the food is and what it does provide:

"Broccoli has iron which has extra power to help you feel energized and cookies have sugar which gives you quick energy."



"NUTRITION MATTERS TO ME. You know what else matters to me? Not giving my kids a weird complex about food...I want to teach my kids that moderation is key and that even junk food has a place in our lives."

**-Sarah Jedd, Mother of 4 on
Madisonmom.com's "Halloween
Candy: Please, Parents, Just Let
Your Kids Eat It"**

**Alex Turnbull, RDN
@TheFamilyNutritionist**

Food does not have any moral value tied to it, therefore using words like "good" or "bad" in relation to certain foods can cause a child to start to feel "good" or "bad" when wanting or eating those particular foods.

All foods provide some form of benefit, whether it be joy, happiness, traditions, memories, raising blood sugar levels for a diabetic, a safe alternative for someone who has a food allergy, or simply the nutrients it provides.

All foods provide energy, some just provide more or different nutrients than others. It's more important to focus on what foods do provide, rather than any one ingredient or nutrient to avoid.

Yes, we should limit added sodium, sugar, and saturated fats but restricting foods because of a particular ingredient or nutrient can quickly become restrictive, only for you to miss out on valuable nutrients that food can provide.

"I'm careful about how I talk about food around my daughter, but she's starting to label and avoid certain foods that are "bad" or "not healthy." I'm worried about this trend – what can I say or do?"

For Tweens

**Sarah R. Moore
Conscious Parenting Master Trainer
@DandelionSeedsPositiveLiving**

This is an example of where we get to be part of the solution by modeling food choices that include really yummy things. Let her see you enjoy gelato or pizza, talking only about how delicious it is, without any of the negative messages. Later, you can acknowledge that it's true some foods have fewer nutritional qualities, but those, too, are part of the whole picture of living a full life with a lot of variety.



For Teens

"What do I do if my daughter wants to wear something for Halloween that is completely inappropriate? How do I talk to her about it without negatively affecting her body image?"

Dr. Kelly Fradin, MD
@AdviceIGiveMyFriends

Rather than reactively telling your child what to do, approach the situation with curiosity. "Tell me more about why you chose this outfit?" Listen first. And after listening, raise your concern, asking your child for solutions.

WHAT TO SAY:

"I'm worried that it's going to be very cold and this costume will not keep you warm."

OR

"I'm worried that you'll have a wardrobe malfunction and expose yourself."

Then see what they suggest as a solution.

There you have it—some tips to make Halloween conversations less scary. This time of year should be fun! We hope this guide helps you navigate discussions, so your child develops positive feelings about food, health, and their body.





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This guide is one piece of WithAll's work to help kids feel good in their bodies and with food. That work only happens because individuals and businesses fund it directly. If it helped you, consider making a gift at withall.org/donate.

Get Financial Help

If you or someone you love is facing an eating disorder, you are not alone. Our Recovery Support Program provides grants for groceries and housing during intensive treatment. Apply at withall.org/apply.