

Parents of one or more children with severe food allergies know first-hand how scary Halloween can be. At parties, baked goods that may or may not be “safe” wait on platters. Well-meaning neighbors give out peanut-laden candy. And frosted pumpkin cookies smile out from bakery windows.

The truth is, food allergies affect more than just the children and their families who are afflicted with raging histamine levels. As the parent of a child without allergies, you may still be asked to make accommodations. You may, in fact, *want* to help and include kids with serious allergies.

If you’re one of those sensitive souls, I first want to say, thank you! I am always deeply touched by my extended family, friends, and other moms and dads at my son’s school who do their best to provide treats everyone can eat.

Making provisions for the food allergic, especially at Halloween, isn’t easy. But here are a few suggestions to smooth the way:

If you’re the parent of a child with food allergies:

1. Consider the Trade It In Policy, wherein you let your food allergic child trick-or-treat around the neighborhood and, when they come home, sort through their loot and trade unsafe candy for safe sweets you’ve purchased ahead of time.
2. Talk to a few select and trusted neighbors to make sure they’ll have safe candy on hand. You can even offer to buy it yourself and secretly deliver the goods before the big night.
3. Skip trick-or-treating altogether and host a party. That way you’re in control of the food served and your child can still celebrate Halloween with all her friends.

Every year, we use all three approaches, trick-or-treating at a few select homes, trading in anything unsafe that may have slipped into the pumpkin bucket, and throwing a small Halloween party for which I bake cupcakes and cookies.

If you’re the parent of a non-food allergic child:

1. While there is no universal treat that every child can have (some children are even sensitive to additives and dyes), you can post a sign on your door for trick-or-treaters saying you’re giving away treats free of the top 8 allergens (wheat, dairy,

eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, fish and soy). A few suggestions for these treats are: Pixy Stix, regular Sweettarts, Dum Dum lollipops, Starburst and Skittles. Always be sure to check labels on candy you buy as ingredients can change.

2. Instead of handing out candy, give small toys. Think pencils, little Play-dohs, stickers and SuperBalls. Some kids are just as, if not more, happy to get something that will last longer than it takes to cram in their mouths.
3. If you'll be bringing treats to a school party, talk to the parents of the food allergic child. Ask if there's anything you can bring that will be safe for everyone. And don't take offense if the other parent politely refuses homemade baked goods. Even though you may be very cautious about your ingredients and cross-contamination issues, each family has different comfort levels.

With careful planning and open communication, every child, even those with severe food allergies, can have a fun Halloween. And you'll have the gratification of knowing you helped create safe and spooky memories for the allergic kids in your life.