While Halloween may offer many exciting opportunities for children overall, social interactions, unusual or even scary outfits, and the sharing of treats may present some stressful or challenging situations to individuals with an autism spectrum disorder or related developmental disabilities. Below are some tips that may help avoid anxiety and help the individual enjoy this festive event.

1. Prepare in Advance and Practice:
   - If the child is going to wear a costume, select it in advance based on his or her preferences. Use a Choice Board with 3-5 types of preferred costumes that you may potentially buy or make and let the individual make a decision. If the child has some trouble with being unusually dressed, practice wearing it prior to Halloween.
   - Create a social narrative to explain what will happen during the evening (see the back) as a way to help prepare the individual.
   - Rehearse activities that may be difficult for the individual, like knocking on the door or ringing the bell, saying “Trick or treat,” “Thank you,” and answering questions about his/her costume by role-playing.
   - Create a visual schedule for the order of events (i.e., go to 5 houses, grandma and grandpa’s house, aunt’s house, all done).

2. On the Day of the Event:
   Sensory input around Halloween might be intense: children and adults wearing costumes, flickering lights, scary objects in the street, loud noises, and so on. Be aware of your child’s sensory needs and plan proactively. It is important that the evening ends on a positive note so allow breaks, if needed, or trick-or-treat for a shorter period of time if that will allow a successful ending.

   - There is no known cure, only effective ways to treat the core challenges that individuals with ASD have difficulties knowing how to act in social settings, communicate simple needs, cope with sensations in their environment, and being respectful of this individual’s special needs in processing and learning about the world.

3. Educate Others:
   Some adults and/or children might not be familiar with characteristics of autism spectrum disorders. Educating them about the disorders before or during the event, might help them appreciate and understand your child more.

Learn more about visual support templates at www.HANDSinAutism.org/tools.html
Sample Halloween Social Narrative

Halloween is Fun!

On Halloween, many kids and adults wear costumes and go trick or treating. This is fun!

This year, I will be a ___________________. It is fun to be a _________ and look different sometimes!

My costume may look scary or funny, but it is OK!

My friends will wear scary costumes too, but I will try not to be afraid. Their costumes are just pretend!

When I go trick-or-treating with my family, I stay with them all the time.

We will walk to the door and ring the bell or knock. When the door is opened, I will try to say “Trick or Treat!”

When people give me candy, I will say “Thank you!” and put candy in my bucket.

People may ask me “Who is this?” And I will say that I am __________

Then, my family and I can go to the next house.
When we get home, I can eat some candy!

When I get home I will let mom or dad check my candy. They will let me know when it is OK to eat it.

Kids may stop by my house and say “Trick or Treat!”

I can give them some candy! It is fun to share candy and it will make other kids happy!

Halloween is Fun!