

Halloween Howlers

Despite the fact that most of us think Halloween is an American tradition that is increasingly becoming more popular here, did you know that Halloween actually originated in Ireland? Halloween originally started as a Celtic pagan festival, marking the end of the 'light half of the year' and a welcome to the 'dark half of the year'. In Ireland the tradition was to light bonfires to welcome ancestors and masks were worn to ward off evil spirits. This explains why Halloween is so spooky and why we dress as scary creatures.

And cut-out pumpkins? Known as Jack'o'lanterns, these also originated in Ireland, although, at that time, turnips were used. It was only when the Irish immigrated to America and brought their traditions with them, that the pumpkin became more popular because it was larger and more plentiful. And why do we 'trick or treat'? Originally this was an Irish tradition from centuries ago when the poor would knock on the doors of rich houses to ask for food or money so that they could celebrate Halloween. Now, of course, it is a great excuse for children to dress up and ask for sweets and treats!

But amid all the excitement and tradition, when the witches are wailing and the skeletons shaking, how do we protect our tiny toddlers from terrible trembling, and babies from bawling in fright? It seems that every year the Halloween season gets bigger and bigger – and starts earlier. And, while it's a great time of year for most children, it can be a horrible horror to

behold for smaller babies and toddlers. The solution is to be prepared and take a few simple steps to ensure that your children are howling in laughter, and not in fear.

- Give them plenty of warning... make sure they understand that something is happening and that houses, shops and schools will soon be decorated with a very strange array of items.
- Be careful not to leave out plates of nuts around the house – they can be a choking hazard for small babies and toddlers.
- Take the mystery out of murderous decorations and get them involved by making some easy home decorations

- from simple paper chain bats or digging out a pumpkin and making a face.
- Make a game out of spotting new decorations around the streets: Spot the witches, count the ghosts, look out for lanterns in the windows
- Keep your own decorations simple and non-scary – pumpkins,

lanterns and a very friendly looking ghost are perfect and child-friendly.

- Likewise, keep your activities simple until your children are older – dressing up and bobbing apples, while keeping them away from older children who may be having ghost story parties are ideal activities.
- If you have older children and have to go trick or treating, make sure you pre-arrange with known neighbours and friends to ensure that there are no unpleasant surprises.
- Better still, have your own trick or treat or fancy dress party in the house, with sweets or treats hidden around the house. Small children can be frightened by sparklers and fireworks, so keep them away from areas and situations you can't control.
- If you have to go to a fancy dress party, arrange for your child to get dressed up with some other friends so that they know who is behind the disguises.
- Once your small children have gone to bed, turn off the door bell, or keep a look out and open the door before it rings.
- Don't forget that schools are on mid-term break – so, if all else fails, you always have the option of going off on holiday for the week! *

