

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:

Holidays often mean time spent with family and trick-or-treating means your kids are exposed to a lot of strangers. If you're concerned about what they might say to your child, check out our [Parent Power Pack](#). This guide helps you navigate conversations with other adults as well as your child if something harmful is said to them about food or body image.

If left to their own devices, some kids would eat candy all night long. And who can blame them, it tastes yummy! 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 an important part of your child's mental and physical health, but positioning exercise as a means to “make up” for calories consumed, or as a way to “earn” the opportunity to eat something tasty, can create unhealthy views of food and physical activity for kids. Try encouraging healthy habits around physical activity without correlating it to what they eat.

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 – either positively or negatively – can lead kids and teens to overfocus on appearance (which makes sense if that is what adults focus on). Even positive comments motivate the belief that “how I look is what matters most.” It can motivate youth to engage in harmful behaviors, like dieting, to keep the external approval and compliments coming. Instead of appearance, try to focus your compliments on other qualities, or – better yet—share encouragement connected to how much you enjoy and appreciate them, regardless of their appearance or performance.

## WHAT TO SAY TIP:

In addition to not commenting on kids’ bodies, try not to comment negatively on your own. Kids will copy their role models. If you are concerned with your weight, your kids can start to think they should be concerned with their own. If Halloween costumes bring up body image insecurities for you, that’s ok! You can still be a strong role model for your kids by not commenting negatively about your body. If you are aware of your insecurities, consider it an opportunity to remind your kids about the most important truth related to bodies: our worth doesn’t come from our size or shape.

## HALLOWEEN Q&A WITH COMMUNITY EXPERTS



**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?"

**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?”**

**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 are 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."**

**FOR MORE FOOD FACTS & CONVERSATIONS STARTERS, CHECK OUT OUR [WTS MEALTIME CARDS](#)**

"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.

**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.

“

**“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"](#)**

”

## WHAT TO SAY TIP:

Are you concerned about your child's body image or relationship with food? Trust your gut. Early intervention is extremely helpful when it comes to eating disorder recovery. Check out [our list of warning signs and resources for seeking help](#). Don't be afraid to contact your child's doctor or the National Eating Disorders Hotline: **1.800.931.2237.**

## WHAT TO SAY TIP:

Talk to your kids about what they post online. As kids get older, they might be tempted to post images of themselves online that are inappropriate or even dangerous. Consider having a conversation that reminds them what is posted online is there forever and to use discretion. You can also take this opportunity to talk about cyberbullying and remind them that bullying others, based on their body or something else, is never okay. For more tips on navigating social media with your kids, check out our [Parent's Guide to Social Media](#).

There you have it! A few examples of how to make Halloween conversations a little less scary. After all, this time of the year can and should be fun! We hope this guide has given you some ideas about what to say and not to say during Halloween and beyond so that your child grows up with positive feelings about food, health, and their body.

### 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.

FOR MORE HELPFUL  
RESOURCES, VISIT  
[WHATOSAYNOW.ORG](http://WHATOSAYNOW.ORG)

**WithAll** 

Supporting Recovery | Inspiring Prevention & Well-being

What to Say is an initiative of WithAll, a nonprofit providing simple, actionable eating disorder prevention and support resources so that all can live whole lives—free from shame, confusion, and fear relating to one's body image or food. To learn more or support our work, visit [withall.org](http://withall.org).

Copyright ©2022 by WithAll | All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.