

# Making Halloween Memories With Baby

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Crisp cool days, picking apples, and frolicking in the woods—fall is an amazing time for making memories and Halloween is the culminating event of the season. For many first time parents, the holiday brings a rush of excitement. Planning baby's first costume, trick or treating with grandma, special sweets, fill our heads as we run for the camera.

Some infants and toddlers will happily go along with adult holiday plans, acting like smiling little bumble bees, crawling devils, and the sweetest witches you ever saw. These children will bundle up in strollers, asleep or awake, and greet folks throughout the neighborhood, entering haunted houses without missing a beat. They'll pose for the JC Penney photographer with delight.



Don't be surprised if this is not your child. Many young children are frightened of Halloween and since mom and dad may find it really fun, they may not be on the lookout for signs of distress. Our youngest children may: Cry and tense the body, turn away when someone is talking to them, or fall asleep to close themselves off from the action.

This is not what we had in mind for making sweet memories. If the baby is distressed does that mean there's something wrong with him? Absolutely not. These are developmentally appropriate responses to a very stimulating event. Here are some reasons children may be scared:

**Costumes:** Children cannot separate what's real from pretend, so monster or ghost costumes, for example, can really confuse infants and toddlers.

**Strangers:** Even familiar people wearing costumes become strangers. By 8 months your child is beginning to know her family and friends; anyone else can be frightening for good reason.

**Darkness:** Infants and toddlers can't tell us that they are afraid of the dark, but their behavior is revealing. Babies in particular might have a hard time seeing at night and with so much activity going on around them on Halloween they could easily become upset

**Noises:** A child might be sensitive to the various sounds of the season from a witch's cackle to a menacing giggle; it's all new to a baby and sometimes overwhelming.

**Crowds:** All the people on the street or at a party may simply be too much for a very young child.

The older the child, the more you might prepare ahead, offering books and images of the holiday to make it more familiar. A 2-year-old, for sure, will benefit from a visual rehearsal.

The combination of crowds, noises, darkness, strangers, and costumes can create an avalanche of uncertainty for a young child—and that is okay. There's always next year to try again. Once you are aware of the triggers, you can shift your celebration to creatively avoid fears. For example, instead of trick-or-treating, have a party at home. Emphasize fall themes rather than spooky ones. No monsters, no spiders.

Most importantly, listen to your child and put their needs first. Don't force a baby to confront their fears. Avoid saying things like "don't be silly, ghosts aren't real, Halloween is so fun." Your patience now will have a lasting impact on your bond, and by accepting your child's feelings this Halloween you will lay the foundation for support and understanding that will impact your relationship and the memories you make together over a lifetime.

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