



## Episode 38: Halloween Myths BUSTED

### **Christy Keating** 00:08

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Happy Halloween, everyone. Yes, it is October 31, 2023. And I'm so grateful to you for joining me on The Heartful Parent Podcast. And whether you're actually listening to this on Halloween itself, or later, I hope that the information I'm going to share with you today is valuable either this year or in a future year. But that it's also just kind of like a reminder that there are a lot of myths out there about safety.

So let's first just start with why I love Halloween so much. And I know it's not celebrated in all parts of the world. But we do celebrate it here in the US and in my family. And I love it. My kids love it for a bunch of reasons. First, in terms of holiday prep and planning, I find it to be pretty easy. Definitely lower key than a lot of other holidays, like Thanksgiving, and my family celebrates Christmas. And so those require a lot more thought and prep and planning and stress and family and all of that stuff, right?

Halloween is just a little lower key. So that is one of the reasons that I love it. The other reason that I love it is that my kids, and occasionally me, get to dress up and pretend to be somebody who they're not right. So this year, my daughter's are dressing up. My older daughter's dressing up as a female pirate. And her costume that she put together, you know, didn't come packaged as one, she found all the different pieces. And it is amazing. It's amazing. And then my younger one, my little one, which went in a totally different direction than I expected her to this year. And she's a glow in the dark skeleton. So super fun, you know, not things that they get to do on a daily basis. And I think that's kind of great.

Another reason I love it is that I think it's a great community building thing, right? We go around to our neighbors, we see people out trick-or-treating or coming to the door who we don't see all the time. And it's just kind of a feel good, fun, spooky, you know, holiday that is great.

I also love it because my husband and I have since the year we got married. So we've been married for seventeen years in 2023. And the very first year that we got married, so a couple of months after we got married, we hosted a pumpkin carving party/slash contest for our adult friends. You know, none of

us had kids at that point. We did this party and it was such great fun. And everybody came with their creativity and carved really amazing pumpkins. And so we turned it into an annual event.

And no joke, y'all, we have been doing this for seventeen years. We even did it through COVID. We did it in our garage, with the garage door open and space heaters trying to keep everybody warm, and we were all bundled up. We didn't let it go. And the year that my older daughter was born, you know, when she was a baby, she was with us. And then we allowed one other year; we were like, Okay, we'll try it with kids. And you know, I'm a Parent coach. I love kids, because they're awesome. I love my kids. They ruined it all. They ruined everything. It was not nearly as much fun with children involved. And so we quickly made the rule that moving forward, we would go back to the no kids thing.

And so now we send out the date like a year in advance. Everybody puts it on their calendar, and they know that come September, they need to start looking for a babysitter. And so it's a contest. And sometimes I put together a gift basket and sometimes it's just a bottle of wine. But whatever it is, we send people off with something that you know, it's kind of fun for whoever carves the best pumpkin. So I will actually, in the show notes for today's show, share a photo of this year's pumpkins, which I think are pretty phenomenal. I might even put some in there from previous years as well. So that is why I love, love, love Halloween.

But let me tell you why I hate Halloween. Aside from the sugar high that our kids get, and it's like sugar all day at school, sugar all night, and then, you know, it becomes this sort of balancing act and battle with our kids over how much sugar they can have. How quickly are they going to eat their candy? And how much of a nightmare does that make parenting? Aside from that, here's why I really hate Halloween, you all know that I am a safety expert, right? I talked about child sexual abuse and sexual assault and keeping our kids safe. And I touch on some other things as well.

And one of the things that I really hate about Halloween is the number of myths that are floating out there around safety on Halloween, and the amount of misinformation and even disinformation that is created and propagated and spread. And you know, all of that, regarding Halloween.

So I wanted to hop on the podcast today and get rid of some of those myths and just talk through a little bit what we need to worry about what we don't need to worry about and maybe put everybody's minds at ease a little bit so that you and your children can have a fun and fantastic time tonight when you want to go out trick or treating. And as I said, if you're listening to this after the fact, no worries, because next year, Halloween will come again, right. And I think this information is really key to know.

Okay, so here's where we're going to start is with some of the myths. So there are three big myths that I hear around Halloween. And they are just that. Okay, so the first is that it is not safe for your kids to be gathering candy from other families. And that before you let them eat any of it, you better check every piece of candy to make sure it hasn't been tampered with. Okay, this was so prominent when I was

growing up. And I have to tell you, I primarily grew up in the Pacific Northwest went trick or treating in Washington State. And as you may know, Seattle is renowned for rain. So it was rainy on Halloween as often as it wasn't, when we got to dry, you know, crisp, beautiful fall day on Halloween, everybody was kind of cheering. And I remember as a child walking around with my friends and my dad, like the dads were always the one that took us out trick-or-treating while the moms stayed home and handed out candy. And my dad would not let me eat any candy until he had checked it thoroughly. And we would stand under the streetlight in the pouring down rain with my dad, like checking the piece of candy to see if it was safe for me to eat.

And then when we got home, you know, as kids do, like we all would pour our, you know I had a pumpkin that I collected my candy and we pour it out on the ground. And we're trading and counting how many pieces we got, et cetera, et cetera. But again, our dads would not let us eat anything until they had thoroughly checked it. Okay, so is this a real risk? Like, do you need to be checking your kids candy? No, no, the answer is no.

So here's what I would tell you. So, sure if it's a homemade treat, you know, I probably and I do, I do require my kids to throw those away. Because, you know, we don't know what kind of food handling safety etc, whatever, you know, if there's allergens or whatever, in the end, whatever it is. So I do have my kids throw those away, unless we know the family where it came from, and I you know, feel very confident in the safety of what they've given us.

But what we know is that with commercial Halloween candy, it is safe to eat, notwithstanding the gobs of sugar and all the other crap that's in there. But the advice to check your candy actually dates back to 1974. So I'm going to date myself here again, but it's the year after I was born. And there was this guy named Richard Turbo, who made this story up and wrote about it in a PTA magazine. Well, what better way then to reach all the parents out there than with a PTA magazine? Right, which at that point, there was no internet. There were no smartphones or anything like that. So the PTA magazine was distributed in hard copy. And parents were reading stories about candy bars and candy apples that were being filled by, you know, these evil citizens with razor blades and needles. Right. So basically, it was a story about a whole bunch of psychopaths that were trying to kill our kids on Halloween.

Now, nevermind the fact that this never happened, there were never kids being killed by strangers, with razor blades and needles and all sorts of things on Halloween, but the story stuck. Right? People didn't fact check it. fact checking was maybe harder back then, given that we didn't have the internet, although the internet certainly perpetuates as many myths as it does, you know, give us the opportunity to fact check them. But nobody fact checked it. The PTA magazine, whoever published that didn't fact check it. And all these parents got it, they read it, and they saw it as gospel. Right? *This is true psychopaths are out there trying to kill our kids.* So that's how this sort of habit of checking kids candy started.

There's a sociologist and professor by the name of Joel Best, who is a leading expert on the issue. And he says that he's been unable to find any substantiated report of a child ever being killed or seriously injured by a contaminated treat that was picked up in the course of trick-or-treating. I think there's a story out there about a parent who actually tried to kill their own child, but no substantiated reports of any child being injured with candy that they got in the course of trick-or-treating.

So, folks, I'm totally cool with you throwing out those homemade treats. I'm also totally cool with you limiting the number of pieces of candy that your kid eats, because of the sugar involved. Or, you know, if you've got a kid who is particularly affected by red dye number forty, or whatever it might be. I'm totally cool with, you throw all that crap out. But please, for the love of God, do not spend your time, waste your time perpetuating this myth, and standing under the streetlamp in the pouring down rain or anywhere else, checking your kids candy. It's fine. Okay, it's fine.

The second myth that kind of goes along with that is, and you've heard me talk about it before the stranger danger myth. Right? That we have to supervise all of our kids, with no exceptions on Halloween, because strangers are likely to swoop in and snatch them up. Or I guess, you know, your kid's going to knock on the door, and they're gonna snatch them into the house. And, okay, no, just like on any other night or any other day, the risk of abduction by a stranger is exceptionally low. Stranger danger is not a thing. Stop using the phrase, it's not real.

You can listen to my episode about that. We'll link to that in the show notes. Actually, there's two episodes dedicated to this issue. One by me and one by a true expert, Dr. Paul Renfro who talks about it, it's not a thing, you do not need to worry. Now if you've got a little child, you know, little kid as I do, sure, you want to accompany them. But it's not because of Stranger Danger. It's because of what is the bigger risk, and we'll talk about that in a moment, which is cars. If you have a teenager, as I do, obviously, you want to talk to them about respectful behavior on Halloween, and not stealing candy and doing stuff like that, or smashing pumpkins, but they're perfectly safe to walk around by themselves.

Now, I do want to sort of caveat this. People, if you are one of those adults out there who is crabby and rude about the fact that you've got a teenager trick-or-treating, knock it off. Knock it off right now. As I see it, there are so many things that our teens could be doing that is not productive, not helpful. Right? They could be sitting at home on their phones, they could be out partying, and you know, drinking or doing whatever with their friends. They could be stealing candy and smashing pumpkins. If you have a teenager who rings your doorbell knocks on the door and is out by themselves or with a friend. Give them some candy. I say the longer they can celebrate and enjoy childhood, the better. And if they want some candy, let them have it. Right? What is the worst thing that's gonna happen besides a sugar high, which is probably more manageable in a teen than it is in a five year old. So let them enjoy that. That was my side note not related to safety.

So Stranger Danger, not a thing. Unsafe candy, not a thing. There are not evil people planning to get out there, and you know, these psychopaths that are planning to kill your kids on Halloween. Okay, it's just not a thing.

Here's another myth that I actually got some misinformation about last year, and I had to go back and correct it. And I feel terrible that I got it wrong, because who should be doing their fact checking about safety stuff? Yours truly. And I didn't I got it from a source that I believed to be credible. It was not on this particular point. And that is that there are drug dealers giving your children candy. That is not really candy but it's actually drugs on Halloween as a way of getting them addicted. Again, not a thing.

Okay. Here's why it's not a thing. Let's just stop and think about this. Okay. Somebody who is a drug dealer has a vested interest in getting people addicted to their product. Right? Who do they want to get addicted to their product? People that can afford to buy their product who cannot afford to buy their product. Children who aren't you know, who are not able to like to go out and get fentanyl or whatever it is children. Okay? So drug traffickers or you know, marijuana or whatever it is like I've also heard the myth that, like marijuana edibles are likely to be put in your child's Halloween basket and that that's another reason why you need to check their candy. Okay, nonsense. Adults are not giving away their weed for free. Any adult who uses marijuana products in any shape, form or fashion has paid money for that. And they are not going to hand it out to some unsuspecting child who's trick-or-treating. Just for the fun of it, right? That's just not likely to happen. They are going to keep that and use that for themselves, I would presume.

So, you know, Rainbow fentanyl, we've all heard about it. rainbow fentanyl is a real thing. And the reason that it is made to look like candy or sidewalk chalk is not for the purposes of tricking young children into using it. It's for the purposes of avoiding detection by law enforcement, right, getting it across the border, transporting it, selling it, etc. It's not to give to your kids on Halloween. Okay, so yes, there are drugs out there. Yes, there are conversations that you need to have with your kids around safety around those drugs, especially your middle schoolers and high schoolers. Okay. Yes, there have been way too many deaths from fentanyl, which is an increasing risk. And it's not being given to your kids on Halloween. So you can take a big deep breath, and calm down. They're not going to give an expensive treat to a child who can't continue paying for it and buying their product. Okay?

Okay, so those were the big myths. The candy is safe, it's not drugged. There aren't drugs being handed out. And abduction, you know, Stranger Danger, not a thing on Halloween any more than it is any other time. I then also spend a moment on my soapbox reminding all of you, children, teens, they're still kids, right? They have undeveloped brains, they are under the age of eighteen. They are legally children, they are children, give them candy, please let them have candy if they come trick-or-treating.

Okay, and then the final piece that I think is really worth noting on this day, is that there is a risk to your kids. I mentioned it briefly like if you have young children about why you should walk them around, and

that is cars. Alright, we do see an increase in foot traffic and an increase in car traffic on Halloween. People are driving around to different neighborhoods. I mean, we have a neighborhood that people sometimes come to, because they think they get good candy. I know there are other neighborhoods out there that are like, *Oh, that's where you get the full size candy bars*. Right. And so people, like, drive their kids into those neighborhoods, or they live in the city, it's just harder to go house to house. And so they bring them to the suburbs, that's totally fine with me. But it does mean an increase in foot traffic and an increase in car traffic.

So before your kids go out, especially if you are not supervising them, and they're going with friends, make sure that there's something on their costume that is visible, right where they're easily visible, and a lot of Halloween costumes are black. So put some reflective tape on them, something that makes them really visible. And talk to them about car safety. Yes, even your teenagers because they get excited. And they get careless about cars, because they're too excited about what's going on and being with their friends and all that good stuff. And so it's much more likely that they, you know, step into the street without paying attention. So have a reminder conversation about cars.

And if you have a younger kiddo, even if you're supervising them, you know, they again, they get really excited and they get careless. And so they may skip or run ahead of you, you know, they may just not be paying attention, you may turn to talk to another parent, or you know, take a shot, we have a house in our neighborhood where they offer candy to the kids and shots for the adults. You know, at least the adults who they know it's kind of fun. But you might be distracted. And so your kid might not be paying close attention and still inadvertently step into the street. So just have lots of conversation and keep an eye out for cars.

Similarly, if you are out driving on Halloween, so my older daughter is not trick-or-treating from our house this year. She's going with some friends at another kid's house. And so I'm gonna have to go pick her up. She's not, she's fourteen, so she's not driving. So I will be one of those people that is out in my car. And I'm going to be extra careful, extra cautious, being you know, keeping my eye out side to side for kids that are in costumes that are tough to spot. And kids, dogs, parents, whoever that might run into the street. You know, dogs might run out the door when somebody rings the doorbell inadvertently so just Keep an eye out. Be careful, drive slow.

And if you do that, and you ignore all these silly things that we don't need to worry about, I am very confident that you and your kids can have a fantastic Halloween, if it is a holiday that you celebrate.

All right, I think that's all that I wanted to share with you today. Kind of keep it a little bit shorter, a little bit sweeter perhaps. I hope you have a fabulous Halloween this year and every year that your kids have a great time and you know that you enjoy that week long sugar high that's about to set in.

All right. Take care, everyone. I'll see you next week.

For next week. We're going to dive into a guest that's going to bring some information to you. That will help with the craziness that's about to set in with the holiday season.

I'll see you there. Take care.