

## The Parent 'Hood *Where moms and dads share their expertise*

# Can your child handle Halloween's horrors?



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Your daughter's third-grade class is going to a haunted house for Halloween and she's prone to nightmares. Should you keep her home?

### Parent advice

Contact the teacher to find out the purpose of the outing. Maybe it is to find out how the special effects in the haunted house happen. Also, does the child want to go? If not, ask the teacher what arrangements have been made for students not participating in the outing.

— *Barb Matarrese*

If she wants to go, then let her. Sometimes our imaginations can be worse than actually seeing something scary. Depending on the haunted house, it may look fake enough to make her laugh instead of being frightened.

— *Marie Grass Amenta*

I would probably ask her teacher or the school psychologist and see if they have any tips on how to avoid problems. If they told me she probably shouldn't go, I would do something else fun with her, like go to the children's museum.

— *Denise Lease*

We can't protect our little ones from

everything and it could send a funny message to a child that fear equals avoidance. If it's really scary, then ask if a chaperone would mind waiting outside with your child. But I would give my child the chance to go on the field trip and decide if she is ready. Maybe she goes through the haunted house and makes it! Wouldn't that be an awesome surprise?

— *Tania Licata*

### Expert advice

Let your child take the lead on this one, says Margret Nickels, director of the Erikson Institute's Center for Children and Families.

"Unless a child actively requests not to be part of a peer experience that is generally safe and appropriate, keeping her from joining her classmates may not be the best strategy," Nickels says. "Children that age gain a great deal of sense of self and self-esteem from being part of a group of friends. Keeping them from being part of shared experiences, like class outings, may undermine their self-esteem and sense of autonomy."

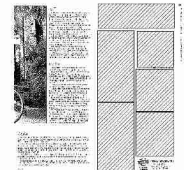
If your child is game for braving the haunted halls, the trip could be as empowering as it is fun.

"If a child wants to be part of an emotionally challenging experience, that may be an opportunity for the child to grow and develop coping skills," Nickels says.

But don't send her into the wilds unprepared. Nickels recommends several steps to keep the outing from turning into a nightmare.

■ "Help the child anticipate potential fears: Talk about what to expect, what the general experience is like in a haunted house. Have the parents been to one? What did they see? What is the overall experience like? Talk about specific sensory aspects — the darkness, the noises, the screaming, the suddenness of things appearing."

■ "Help the child gather emotional support: Would she like to see if she can sit with a teacher or adult chaperone? Could the parent go on the school trip with the



child? What friends would the child like to sit next to that would make her feel safer?"

■ "Keep in mind that these conversations should be conducted in a calm, playful tone. If parents become too worried about the child's experience, they will inadvertently convey the message that the child will not be able to manage the situation, thus heightening the child's sense of anxiety."

■ "After the trip is over and the child comes home, talk with her about her experience."

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## Got a solution?

You miss hanging out with your teenager but can't interest him in family outings. Any suggestions? E-mail us your thoughts at [parenthood@tribune.com](mailto:parenthood@tribune.com).