

## Halloween for Canines

Yes, here it comes! The stores have had Halloween candy out for months. Let's talk about Halloween and the things we should acknowledge from a dog's perspective. Costumes are odd. People in revelry can be fast moving, loud, and unpredictable. People try to come up to your door, with high energy and costumes. There are lots of forbidden treats around with sometimes easy access for the dogs. Joining their human family for trick-or-treating could be a drawn-out process, especially if no one is paying attention to the dog.

From your perspective, you may be picking out costumes for you and your kids and maybe even your dog. For the eve of Halloween, you are choosing among the public events and the neighborhood opportunities or hosting that super cool trick-or-treat destination. Knowing that all that activity will happen at the end of this month means that right now, in early October, is the time to be asking your canine companion what they like to do so you can make sure everyone in your family has a good time!

Now let's ask your dog these questions:

1. Fido, do you want to go to a Halloween party? Fido says yes, he loves people and other dogs.
2. Fido, do you want to meet 5 people? Oh yes!
3. Fido, how about 5 people wearing hats? Oh, I'm not sure about people wearing hats.
4. Fido, how about 3 people wearing animal heads on their heads, one person in a knight's helmet, and one person in a rubber face of a former president? Oooo, that sounds worse than hats.
5. How about all those people at one time? Not sure, I've never seen that.
6. Okay how about after those 5 people, you see 5 more and they are different ages.
7. How about they are all loud and trying to hug you? Then you see 5 additional people without a break in between the groups.

You can just visualize with these questions that there is a lot going on in the environment that is likely new and unexpected for your dog. Okay that sounds hard. But you've already chosen a specific event the family is going to, and the location is for dogs, and we all want to have fun. Here's an idea - what if you designate a Dog Person? This Designated Dog person is a member of your family who stays sober of all the giddiness, maybe has a low-level costume (normal shirt and pants and no head covering), and is present to ensure that your dog gets through the night safely and happily? This is a plan!! And we have a whole month to perfect this plan.

The Designated Dog person will be observing the dog, checking in at least every few minutes to see if your dog is having a good time. To determine whether a good time is being had we want to look at more than is your dog not pulling at the leash and not barking. A good time might look like this:

- Your dog calmly investigating the things around them by sniffing the ground? Great sign of enjoyment!
- Is your dog getting water and a place to go to the bathroom?
- Are you keeping an eye on the time during which your dog is inundated by 7 flashing rainbow unicorn princesses? It's likely that after 5-10 minutes of the princesses, your dog's body language will look differently.
- Is your dog starting to duck the sticky hands that are reaching for your dog? Or is your dog gently stepping in to get more?

These body language signals can be overt, or they can be subtle. Whether obvious or not, dogs' signals tend to be consistent, so if you start now, you should be highly observant by Halloween.

For the month of October, you can have a similar conversation with your dog. Ask the questions about what your dog enjoys by doing very toned-down versions. For example, what happens when we go to the bus stop? Your dog might be having a good time if they are not overly aroused (not lunging or vocalizing), but they are engaging with others. Now, compare this to your future plan of attending a Halloween party at the local park.

	<b>Bus Stop</b>	<b>Halloween party</b>
<b>Duration</b>	<15 min	>1 hour
<b>Guests</b>	Adults and children and dogs	Same but dressed up in costumes, louder, higher energy
<b>Environment</b>	Familiar	new

Try other locations that might have some of the same features as your intended night spot. Over the month you will gain information about your dog. Use these experiences to guide where you ultimately go and what you ultimately do on Halloween.

Here's some general guidelines. On the Eve of Halloween, the Designated Dog person should:

1. Keep stress levels low. Watch your loved one's body language.
2. Take breaks. Even if it's just stepping out of the limelight for a few minutes. Take a walk around the parking lot.
3. Be aware of temperature, water availability, and elimination options.
4. Only let people interact with your dog once they check with you.

5. Limit the on-leash greetings, even for dog savvy dogs. And certainly no longer than 3 seconds. Go for a walk together if you want to talk to the people.
6. Respect the unusual circumstances of high arousal and costumes.
7. Costumes that your dog wears should be only for a photo, and only if it is super easy to get your dog into it. If you want something festive while you are out and about, consider items that are similar to what they usually wear like a collar, but with tassels.
8. Protect your dog from getting those human treats, especially the chocolate ones or the raisins. Also keep an eye out for the wrappers.

Sometimes it is best to have a bit of time where you don't need a Designated Dog person and your dog can just relax at home while you go dress up with loud people and bob for apples.

Either way, stay safe and have fun!