

Handling Halloween Candy Differently

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There is always concern about how much candy kids are eating at Halloween, but what about parents who consume nearly half of what the kids are bringing home? Candy is a comfort food for many of us, and when lying around in bowls and bags, it becomes a temptress greater than most adults can resist. Do you find yourself unable to stop when it comes to Halloween candy?

Instead of gearing up for a binge fest and worrying about how you are going to handle having all that candy around the house, consider what is driving you to overeat and crave it and then put some strategies in place to help yourself eat much less of it.

Some of the most common reasons people can't seem to stop at a few pieces of Halloween candy start with feelings of deprivation. Candy for most people is considered junk food or a food they should not have, and for them candy is on the forbidden food list. When they eat it, they believe they are being bad and falling off their diet, so they have to finish it and get it out of the house to be in control. Then they strive to stay away from it until the holidays get underway and they find themselves right back in the same place, struggling to avoid the next round of bingeing on sweets and striving (but failing) to be in control. It is a never ending cycle that continues right through Valentine's Day. Does this happen to you?

What does this have to do with deprivation? Everything. When you believe that you shouldn't have something, you want it all the more. And the more you try to control the urges and deprive yourself, the more you obsess and overdo it when given the chance. This is human nature, and it is easy to see in children. We tend to forget that as adults we aren't any different. Like kids we rebel against harsh rules and restrictions that are depriving.

We want our candy – or what it represents, but we are determined to apply willpower to resist it. This creates an internal battle between our Enforcer voice and our Rebel voice. Very often the Rebel wins out. But because of the loud Enforcer in the background, harshly criticizing you for what you are doing, you begin to feel guilt and shame, which triggers emotional eating and an all out binge. Next thing you know you've eaten more pieces than you want to admit and you feel uncomfortably sick.

What if you created an agreement with your Enforcer and Rebel voices by allowing yourself a bit of candy every once in awhile, agreeing that it isn't forbidden and that if you really want it you can have it in moderation. Now you have calmed down the Rebel voice that will have a tantrum by overeating if it doesn't get its way. The trickier voice to negotiate with is the Enforcer. This is because the Enforcer is the one that enforces your beliefs.

When your beliefs are black and white and don't allow for some grey, then the Enforcer will instigate the Rebel. If you allow for moderation and satisfaction along with some guidelines for restraint, then the Rebel and Enforcer will both quiet down. If you also allow for throwing out the candy when the family has enjoyed it and had enough, everyone wins.

To put this in practice, try the following guidelines (or strategies) to help both the Enforcer and Rebel trust that their needs (meaning your needs) will be met. The first guideline is to eat candy along with a meal so that you aren't eating it alone and driving up your blood sugar levels, which in turn leads to cravings. The second guideline is to pay attention to when you are satisfied or the first signs of feeling a bit full and stop eating. If you know you want some candy with dinner then make room for it instead of eating it when you are full.

Third, pick just 2-3 pieces of candy that you know are your favorites and savor them, so that you achieve satisfaction. And fourth, tell yourself that you can have more at your next lunch or dinner, so you know that you won't be deprived and can still enjoy this once-a-year candy fest. After a few days, you will all have enjoyed having a bit of candy and you'll be left with candy that isn't your most favorite or you will be tired of it. Now throw what is left out. You won't miss it, because you've let yourself enjoy it. And if that Rebel acts up, tell it that there is always more at the grocery store if it really wants to have it again before next Halloween. This week put guidelines in place so you can enjoy yourself without anxiety on the 31st.

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