

Halloween no laughing matter for some kids

September 22 2005

Halloween may seem like so much harmless fun, but a Penn State University researcher in Media, Pa., says the humor might be lost on some younger children.

Cindy Dell Clark, an associate professor of human development at Penn State's Delaware (Pa.) County campus, says that's especially true for 6- or 7-year-old children -- many of whom don't find the holiday at all funny.

Clark says parents need to realize scaring children of that age only makes the fear of death and other things even more frightening.

"Halloween is a time when we expose kids to behavior that is not the norm. Children connect the holiday with death," she said. "We typically distance ourselves from death and shield children from it, but, in this case, young children encounter their fears when they face decorations of skeletons and tombstones."

Clark's research included interviews with parents and 6- and 7-year olds. Her study -- entitled "Tricks of Festival: Halloween, Children and Enculturation" -- was published recently in the anthropological journal, *Ethos*.

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Citation: Halloween no laughing matter for some kids (2005, September 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-09-halloween-kids.html>

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