

Balance365 Episode 38 Transcript

Annie: If you're like me, I always cringe a little bit at the thought of how much candy my kids could potentially consume this time of year and on last week's episode Lauren and I discussed our top tips for navigating the candy season as an adult and today, Jen is joining me to do the same in regards to our kiddos. On today's short episode, Jen and I share three really great tried and true tips for helping teach your children moderation with Halloween candy this year. Enjoy!

Good morning, Jen. How are you?

Jen: Morning. Good. Tired. It's early.

Annie: I know, it's early. What time is it?

Jen: Well, it is 6:45 am which I know isn't early for most people but my alarm did go off at 5:50 this morning and you and I started chatting 6:30.

Annie: Yep. And whenever you come on in the morning it's always funny because you have your robe and-

Jen: My coffee.

Annie: Morning voice.

Jen: And my groggy morning voice. Yeah.

Annie: Yeah, well I think, thank you for getting up.

Jen: No problem.

Annie: And talking to me this morning. So last week, Lauren and I discussed some strategies for helping adults navigate the candy season. As Halloween is upon us and today we wanted to discuss specifically kids, because the information we shared in last week's podcast about adults doesn't necessarily apply to children and we have some alternative suggestions, because I know what I've tried, personally, is everything from like "You get a couple pieces of candy and then we're throwing the bag away" to "Just eat all the candy. Do whatever you want." Somewhere in between, we've tried a couple different solutions and I think the suggestions we have here today can be really helpful if

you're not sure how you want to tackle and talking and implementing moderation and candy and Halloween.

Jen: For sure and these are the guidelines that I have used for four years now with my kids and they work wonderfully.

Annie: Yeah, so our first suggestion, let's just jump right into it, is actually the same as the one we share on the adults but it's "Don't skip meals before trick or treating" and it may seem like a good idea to just pass on dinner considering, when you're thinking about the quantity of candy that your children could consume but eating a balanced meal before they head out can help ensure that they're not ravenous midway through and melting down over, like, a mini snickers and then overeating candy because they're just hungry. I know I do that and I think kids do that as well.

Jen: Oh, absolutely.

Annie: So, like, you wait until you're starving and then you just eat all the things.

Jen: Yeah, we have a family tradition and I got this when I was growing up, this is what my mom did and now I do it for my kids. I make a big pot of chili in the slow cooker and bake a side of garlic bread and that we have like a Halloween dinner.

So sometimes we will go trick or treating for a little bit come back and have chili or we'll just have our chili dinner and then go trick or treating but yeah, definitely making sure-

Annie: That sounds good. I like that.

Jen: Yeah.

Annie: And believe it or not I can I can cook chili. That is like one thing, I can, pretty much, because it's like brown some meat and throw stuff in a crockpot.

Jen: Yeah and I don't make chili super often so my kids, they, you know, it's part of this Halloween tradition and they know, you know, I think they're, they look forward to the chili as much as the candy, a little bit.

Annie: Yeah, that's, I love that, I'm going to adopt that, I'm stealing.

Jen: Yeah, go ahead.

Annie: Stealing that.

Jen: Go for it.

Annie: We should come up with a Balance365 Halloween Chili recipe.

Jen: Yes, we should.

Annie: I'm not volunteering.

Jen: I'll share my mom's. It's really good.

Annie: Oh, yeah. OK, second point is make it a learning opportunity and this is advice that we had adopted from Ellyn Satter which we've talked about on previous podcasts on feeding your families and she is a family therapist who specializes in family feeding and eating and she encourages that the goal is to eventually have children to be able to manage their own candy consumption and I know you have a story to share about that but this is what she suggests and I pulled this right from the Ellyn Satter Institute website which we can link in the show notes, but it's for your children to learn you have to keep interface to a minimum and so when he or she comes home from trick or treating, let him lay out his booty, gloat all over it, sort it, eat as much as he or she wants and let them do the same the next day, then have them put it away and regulate it to meal and snack times, a couple of small pieces at meals for dessert and as much as he or she wants at snack time.

If they can follow the rules, your child gets to keep control of the stash, otherwise you do, on the assumption that as soon as he can manage it, he gets to keep it. Offer milk with candy and you have the chance at good nutrition and I know Jen, you have some thoughts on this because reading this the first time I was like, she's suggesting, this family therapist who specializes in family feeding and eating is suggesting just to let your kid eat what they want the first couple days and I'm like "They're going to eat all of it. They're going to eat all of it." So tell me, tell me your experience with this, when you did this.

Jen: So this is probably the most important point in this podcast and the reason why your child might go crazy on a bag of candy is because, well, there's just so much of it, they're really excited, for one but number two, is studies show that children who have struggle with moderation are the children who come from more restrictive homes and I have shared a lot about my feeding journey with my

kids on this podcast in various episodes because it was an enormous struggle for me to find a balanced, middle, moderate ground with my kids coming from such a restrictive dieting background myself, even when I, myself, didn't feel I was a restricted dieter anymore, I wouldn't have considered myself that, I found that I was still putting a lot of rules on my kids, so that was a whole journey in itself.

So, our story with Sam was, it was Halloween and he was five and he's now nine, so we're going out trick or treating in the neighborhood and you know, I had Ellyn Satter's guidelines in my head. We had, you know, I was really into this improving his relationship with food, you know, area of our life because I've shared on a previous podcast I had, just a couple months prior, had found out he was hoarding food in his room, so my focus at that point was really going, like, I need to, I need to help this child, right?

So, I knew it wasn't going to go well or great that night and I knew a lot of that was my own anxieties around food and candy. But I followed Ellyn Satter's guidelines, we went trick or treating, we went home with the kids, dumped their candy out on the table and we said "Go to town." We did that again the next night, dumped the candy on the table, told them to go to town and then after that we started bringing out candy during meals and what happened the first night was Sam ate so much candy he got sick. He threw up and it was very hard for me to watch but it is, it is hard to watch your kids make mistakes, when you know they're about to make a mistake and I mean, at any age, in any situation, it is hard to watch your kids make mistakes, however understanding that that is how they learn and you have to let them learn their own lessons sometimes.

So, I had this all in my mind, he threw up and I just discussed with him after, "How did that feel? What would you do next time?" and just totally with no judgment and the letting him decide what, you know, the course of action should be. So he said, "That did not feel very good. I don't want to do that again. Next time, I think I will eat less candy." I said, "OK, yes, sounds good."

Annie: Did angels sing from the heavens?

Jen: Yeah. Pretty much. And I really thought, "OK, this is working, you know, this is working, all of the guidelines that I have read in, you know, it's like, it's working, it's like magic!"

So the next night, I mean he still went to town on the candy the next night. He just, he did eat less, he didn't get sick the next night and then we brought it out during meals and it was fine. It really was fine and eventually they forgot about it and I'm known in the past to be one of those "crazy moms", I shouldn't say "crazy" because I know we're all coming from a place of, you know, it's coming from a good place, and I would only let him pick out a couple candies on Halloween, you know, and then it just would become a fixation, so he, you know, prior to that year, Halloween and Easter and all these candy holidays were very stressful for us because I would, you know, I came at it from the position of "I'm going to try and control this, control their intake" and then the kids would just become fixated on the candy for that holiday and I would be hiding it and I would find them trying, you know, they would be trying to find it and I would catch them in the Halloween bag up in the cupboard and, you know, then there would be trouble and stress and I hate Halloween and I wish we didn't have all these candy holidays, where as soon as I relaxed and let them go through the process, it has taken all the stress out of these holidays, and it has taken, it has made me see that my children are capable of moderating themselves when given, you know, first, step one was unrestricted access and then controlled access.

So what happened was that first year that I implemented these changes, my kids forgot about their candy for the first time ever and we ended up just bringing the candy out during meals and then I ended up just bringing, and then we transition to just bringing it out after supper and eventually they forgot about the candy. They just forgot about it and then I stopped bringing it out and then I ended up throwing it all away because, as everybody knows, like, you just get so much candy and you end up with the stuff they don't really like anyways, but it was just, it was amazing to me.

So that has been our process every year now and every year it's the same thing, you know, my kids, they don't have to feel any urgency or scarcity around this Halloween candy because they know we're not getting home and I'm not going to be taking it away and, you know, so-

Annie: Or hiding it, like you said.

Jen: Or hiding it or I mean, I still, I still do, not hide it, but I keep it, I still do keep it in a cupboard that they can't reach so, you know, unrestricted access day one, unrestricted access day two and then I keep it in a cupboard that they can't reach but, you know, just saying "It'll come down at lunch, it'll come down at supper and

it'll come down at snack time even, I was bringing it for afternoon snack. And then following through with what I was saying, so that they trusted it and yeah, it was just, it went so well that first year and it may not go as well for people that first year, but you have to remember that if you have been very restrictive with your kids' diet or very restrictive in previous Halloween, Easter, Valentine's Day and your kids are old enough to have those memories, that they just may not trust you with what you're saying and you just have to keep following through with what you say.

Annie: Yes and it could be a practice, you know, like you said, it might not go as well as your experience to the first time. It might take, you know, a couple days and like Ellyn Satter suggests, that like this is assuming that they can "follow the rules" and they can control the stash and if they can't, then you control it and they can earn it back, you know, it might take some trial and error, like, "Oh, a bit too much," you know, now Mommy or Daddy is going to take it back and then you can have that and we can try again, you know, like this is just like an evolution to learn this skill.

Jen: I think if you if you approach it with that attitude of you need to figure out what's going to work for your family, while also keeping in mind that it's restrictive practices that lead children to not being able to moderate or control themselves and there's studies that back this up.

I did a Facebook Live a couple weeks ago on our public page and I referenced one study in particular that looked at nine children who were eight and nine years old I think it was and there was just a study done on them in school and they were given unrestricted access to food and the children who could not control themselves around this food. So they would have lunch all together and then they would be given unrestricted access to snack items and the kids who could not control themselves with these snack items were the children who had more restrictive of food philosophies in their homes and the kids whose homes were more liberal with food, they, you know, they they did not have trouble moderating themselves with this food.

So it's really important to understand that and see, you know you see the pattern in yourself and you know you'll see these patterns in your kids and the solution is always to restrict, restrict, restrict, and as we say over and over on almost every single podcast, that really is not the answer.

So and you also have to understand that there's always a pendulum swing coming off restriction, right, it's that binge restrict-

Annie: Where Sam ate so much he throws up.

Jen: So that was Sam bingeing, right, I mean it was so hard for me to watch but I had to let him learn his own mistakes and we continue to do that with different things, like, I don't like, you know, like, you know, he just, learning, right, learning about food, learning about his own body.

Annie: I do that as an adult sometimes, like, I mean, and we see this with the women we coach in Balance365 when we talk about our hunger and fullness cues. It can take some while, some trial and error, some just practice to actually find out when am I full, when am I too full.

Jen: Yeah. Absolutely.

Annie: And sometimes paying attention to, like, that line, when that line gets crossed. I remember, I think I've shared this before, I ate one way too many mini Butterfingers one Halloween and I did the same thing as Sam and it's like-

Jen: Oh, you got sick, oh no!

Annie: I cannot look at that many Butterfingers ever again. But it's, like, that's really is how you learn. Or it can be one of the great ways for your children to learn that skill of moderation and I think that walks us right into our third and final point which is to model moderation yourself with Halloween candy. As I mentioned at the beginning, Lauren and I discussed last week some strategies for navigating Halloween candy as adults and as the old adage goes, monkey see monkey do and allowing your kids to see you enjoy Halloween candy without the shame, without the self loathing, without the "Oh my gosh, just take this bag away, I can't," you know, like all the-

Jen: Just all the discussing and complaining about Halloween, complaining about how we shouldn't have these holidays and-

Annie: Yeah, having your kid see you do that and model that behavior and enjoy Halloween candy in moderation, whatever that looks like to you, can help set the stage for them to do the same and maybe that's, like, maybe you enjoy candy on Halloween night with them and then, you know, you do the same the next day

and then we put it up and then you have a couple pieces at meal and snack time to with them, you know and then it goes away and then comes back, goes away and comes back and I think that that's a really great follow up point.

Jen: Yeah, when I started implementing these rules it was, like I was saying, it was the first year my kids forgot about the candy and just became disinterested in it and I threw it away and it was, I think, it was that first year it was on day ten and I was like, "Nobody is eating this candy anymore. Nobody even cares about it. Everybody has moved on. Halloween was almost two weeks ago" and I thought, I'm just, you know, all the candy that was left in there was things we didn't really like, so I threw it away and I just thought "Well, that went shockingly well."

Annie: Yeah, but you really do have to trust the process.

Jen: You do, yes.

Annie: What we see so often when women and, I'm back talking about adults now, but when women, in our experience, when they take off those labels of "This is bad. I shouldn't have this. I can't have this." They do, their pendulum does swing, just like Sam's did, their pendulum swings, they eat all the food.

Jen: Yeah, absolutely.

Annie: And your instinct in that, your impulse, we've been conditioned to, when you're in that stage, is to pull that pendulum right back to the other side, "Oh, nope, ate too much, I can't have any more.

Jen: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: It's like, just let that calm down in the middle.

Jen: Yeah, just we say, we always say in Balance365, observe yourself without judgment. So if you can observe yourself without judgment and see everything as a learning experience, your pendulum is more likely just to end up in the center in a nice balanced place.

Annie: Yeah, where you don't feel like you have to hide the Halloween candy or you can't trust yourself around the Halloween candy or trust your kids and that feels like a really great place for me to be.

Jen: Yes, absolutely.

Annie: Yeah, I like that.

Jen: Yes and our children.

Annie: Yeah. OK quick recap, so if you're going out for beggar's night tonight or in the following night, step one: don't skip meals before trick or treating, like feed them a balanced meal, offer all the foods you would normally, like Jen said, maybe a bowl of chili. I serve Fritos with mine. Do you use Fritos, like those chips? Those corn chips?

Jen: I don't know what Fritos are.

Annie: OK, bye.

Jen: Like Doritos?

Annie: No, they're corn chips.

Jen: No, we have garlic bread. I don't know what those are but sure it-

Annie: Okay, it must be a US thing or an Iowa thing.

Jen: So is Beggar's Night, nobody calls it Beggar's Night here.

Annie: Do you do a trick or treat like kids do have to do a trick or treat.

Jen: Yeah on the evening of the 31st.

Annie: I think this is also maybe a midwest thing. I'll be interested to see if the East Coast, West Coast because you, well, you grew up in like the Midwest of Canada.

Jen: Central.

Annie: Step two is the learning opportunity which we adopted from Ellyn Satter. So, let them have the candy the first couple of nights unregulated and then bring it out to meal and snack times and if they can control it, if they can follow the rules around the candy that they get to keep control of their stash, otherwise then you step in but the key here is to keep the interface at a minimum, just like Jen said with Sam, just let him, let him do it, let him make the mistakes if they need to

and just be there to support them when it's over and to discuss it and then step three is model moderation yourself. So, lead the way, right, be the change you wish to see in your kids and your family. Model good behavior around or model moderation, I shouldn't say "good" but model moderation around candy yourself.

Jen: Yeah.

Annie: Anything to add?

Jen: No, that was great. Nice and simple and quick.

Annie: Quick and easy, right? Well Happy Halloween, Jen.

Jen: Yeah, you too.

Annie: OK, we'll talk soon.

Jen: Bye.

Annie: Bye.