



For potential Halloween coverage, we're offering a curated roster of subject matter experts from Emory who are ready and available to share some spine-chilling tales and topics surrounding this spooky month.

From unmasking the devil to the psychology of why people seek out the thrill of being frightened, Emory University is not afraid to embrace the spookiest time of year. We also have an expert pediatric clinician with tips on making the holiday enjoyable for trick or treaters with autism.

*If you would like to be connected to one of our experts listed below, please contact the media relations team at [news@emory.edu](mailto:news@emory.edu).*

### **1) Unmasking the devil**

From haunted houses to blockbuster horror films, the imagery of demons and the devil captivates and terrorizes audiences of all ages. This enduring intrigue has a complex history, deeply rooted in religious narratives and societal anxieties. But how did the cross section between faith, cultural representation and collective fears morph the figure of the devil into the iconic red creature with horns that we recognize today?

Emory expert: Rev. Dr. Gabrielle Thomas, assistant professor of early Christianity and Anglican studies, has written extensively on representations of the devil within Christianity.

### **2) Tips for Autism and Halloween**

What do those little blue plastic pumpkin totes mean this Halloween? It could indicate that the trick-or-treater has Autism, which, according to the CDC, impacts [1 in 40](#) children in Georgia. For these children, should the community members expect a "trick-or-treat" greeting? Should parents always expect these children to wear costumes? Emory's Dr. Susan Brasher offers expert tips on how to make Halloween enjoyable for everyone, with neurodiverse individuals in mind. In addition to Dr. Brasher, we have a student whose brother has autism, for a more personal, human-interest angle. The student also volunteers for a peer-mentor support program for autistic students enrolled at Emory.

Emory expert: Dr. Susan Brasher, is an assistant professor at Emory's School of Nursing, and an expert on health disparities of children and young adults on the autism spectrum. Her research focuses on Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### **3) Unraveling the allure of fear**

We explore haunted houses, enjoy iconic horror films and participate in ghostly tours. But what drives us to seek out experiences that are terrifying, why do some people thrive in environments that are frightening to others, and what characteristics do these sensation-seekers typically possess?

Emory expert: Dr. Ken Carter, a professor of psychology at Oxford College of Emory University, studies the lifestyle, psychology and neuroscience behind thrill-seeking individuals, and is the author of *Buzz! Inside the Minds of Thrill-Seekers, Daredevils and Adrenaline Junkies*. He's found both biological and environmental reasons that explain why some people seek thrills and says that being a high-sensation seeker has benefits.

#### **4) Full moon stories from the ER**

Going into Halloween, there's a full moon on October 17-- but are the rumors true? Do full moons really create wilder stories from the emergency rooms? Meet with Dr. Paula Tucker to learn if there's any truth to this urban legend (or not), plus get her expert tips on keeping cool in spooky situations and staying safe this Halloween.

Emory expert: Dr. Paula Tucker is an associate professor and specialty director of the Emergency Nurse Practitioner Program at Emory University's School of Nursing. She is also an advanced practice provider at the Grady Emergency Care Center, an expert on safety, and on how to avoid the ER on any holiday.

#### **5) Astronomical origins of Halloween**

Halloween's origins can be traced to a distant agricultural past and is linked to an ancient Celtic festival called Samhain, which means "summer's end." The day actually marks the point midway between the autumnal equinox, the astronomical beginning of autumn, and the winter solstice, or beginning of winter. As such Halloween is considered a "cross-quarter day," or a day that crosses between the first half of autumn and the second half.

Emory expert: Dr. Erin Bonning, associate teaching professor and director of Emory Planetarium, can discuss the astronomical origins of Halloween, and the stars and constellations that are visible in the night sky.