Beyond Pumpkins and Costumes: Creative Halloween Activities for Every Level of Care

Halloween is one of the most anticipated times of the year in senior living. The decorations, treats, and costumes set the stage for fun, but Activity Professionals know that thoughtful planning is what makes the holiday special for residents. Instead of relying only on a Halloween party or a costume contest, consider these creative ideas that bring engagement and connection to Memory Care, Assisted Living, and Skilled Nursing communities.

Memory Care
Residents living with dementia often connect best with simple, sensory-focused activities. Short, hands-on experiences can help spark conversation and encourage participation.

- Pumpkin Sensory Boxes: Fill bins with artificial leaves, small pumpkins, or Halloween trinkets for residents to explore by touch.
- Halloween Scavenger Hunt: Use laminated pictures of bats, witches, and pumpkins. Residents can mark them off with stickers or crayons as they find them.
- Musical Moments: Play familiar Halloween songs like “Monster Mash” and invite residents to clap or tap along.

Assisted Living
Residents in Assisted Living may enjoy activities that allow them to express creativity and socialize in groups.

- DIY Décor: Create beaded corn cobs or egg carton ghosts. These can decorate hallways or resident doors and become conversation starters.
- Themed Baking Session: Host a Rice Krispie monster treat class where residents decorate their own edible “creatures.”
- Halloween Trivia: Mix pop culture, history, and fun Halloween facts for a lighthearted game that gets everyone involved.

Skilled Nursing
Programming in Skilled Nursing often works best with activities that are adaptable and supportive.

- Halloween Bingo: Add themed words or pictures to cards for a seasonal twist.
- Pumpkin Parfaits: Prepare layers of fruit and whipped topping to resemble candy corn. Residents can help assemble their own.
- Craft Stations: Offer simple crafts with large materials, such as painting small wooden pumpkins or adding stickers to paper cutouts.

Bringing Everyone Together
Group celebrations can still be part of the fun when they are designed with inclusivity in mind. A community-wide pumpkin decorating contest, for example, can include painted pumpkins, sticker-decorated pumpkins, or even paper pumpkin art so that every resident has a chance to participate. Costume parades can be adapted to feature residents who prefer to wear festive hats or masks rather than full costumes.

Halloween programming in senior living can go far beyond candy and costumes. With a little creativity, Activity Professionals can provide opportunities for sensory exploration, social interaction, and joyful connection. By tailoring activities to the needs of Memory Care, Assisted Living, and Skilled Nursing, every resident can share in the spirit of the season.