How to carve a pumpkin with kids: their jobs, your jobs, and easy designs

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Pumpkin carving with kids by age, the steps a grown-up keeps, how to use a stencil, easy carving ideas, no-carve pumpkins for little ones, and LED, never a candle.

When you carve a pumpkin with kids, a grown-up does every cut, and the kids do nearly everything else. They pick the face, draw it, scoop out the seeds, poke the stencil's dots with you beside them, and put the light in. Under 5, skip the knife entirely and paint or decorate instead. Light it with an LED tea light, never a candle, and check its battery door first. Below: the jobs by age, the steps in order with who does each, how to use a stencil, easy pumpkin carving ideas, and no-carve ideas for the littlest.

I'm a parent who built Peabody, a free reading and math site, and this week I added the Pumpkin Patch: 52 pumpkin designs, each with a stencil you print at real size, and steps that mark every job Grown-up, You or Together. Writing those steps meant deciding exactly where the line between a child's job and a grown-up's sits. Here's where I put it, and why. The Pumpkin Patch is free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up.

The one rule: a grown-up does every cut

The American Academy of Pediatrics' Halloween safety tips say adults should do any carving or cutting, that small children can decorate pumpkins with markers instead, and that they can help scoop out the pulp and seeds. That matches how carving goes in most houses anyway: the knife and saw work is short and fiddly, and the parts kids love (choosing the face, the squishy scooping, the reveal with the lights off) are theirs.

On the Pumpkin Patch every cut, saw, scrape and drill step is a grown-up's at every age, the same rule the Kitchen uses for knives and the oven. Older kids still have plenty to do, as the table shows.

What kids can do at each age

- Age: 2 to 4 · Their jobs: Wipe the pumpkin, paint with a sponge or fingers, scribble a face with washable markers, choose stickers · Your jobs: Stick on anything small, like googly eyes · Designs to start with: No-carve: silly marker face, candy corn stripes
- Age: 5 and 6 · Their jobs: Draw three faces on paper and pick one, scoop the seeds, poke dots with a pumpkin poker while you watch, put in the LED · Your jobs: The lid, every cut · Designs to start with: Easy: classic grin, surprised face, heart eyes
- Age: 7 and 8 · Their jobs: Tape on the stencil, poke every dot, scrape the inside wall thin with a spoon · Your jobs: Sawing along the dots, scraping the grey parts · Designs to start

with: Medium: cat face, flying bat, friendly ghost
• Age: 9 and up · Their jobs: Choose or design the stencil, place it, poke it, plan where the bridges go, run the photo shoot · Your jobs: Every cut, and the careful bridge work · Designs to start with: Tricky: bats across the moon, haunted house

Every child is different. A careful five-year-old might happily poke a whole stencil; a distractible eight-year-old might be done after the scooping, and that's fine.

How to carve a pumpkin with kids, step by step

This is the order the carved designs on the Pumpkin Patch follow, with who does each step. Steps 4 and 6 only come up for some designs.

1. Cut the lid (grown-up). Cut round the stem with a serrated knife, slanting the blade in so the lid can't fall through. A hole in the bottom works too. For a picture that fills the whole front, like a moon, cut a hole in the back instead.
2. Scoop it out (kid). A big spoon or an ice-cream scoop works better than the little scoops in carving kits. Scrape the front wall until it's about as thick as a finger. Save the seeds in a bowl.
3. Poke the dots (together). Tape the stencil to the front and poke dots along every black line with a pumpkin poker or a thick pin, a grown-up right there. Then peel the paper off.
4. Drill the round holes (grown-up). Only for designs with dots, like the polka-dot pumpkin or the stars.
5. Cut along the dots (grown-up). Use a small pumpkin saw, a little at a time, and push the pieces out from the inside. Kids can watch for the moment each piece pops free.
6. Scrape the grey parts (grown-up). Only for designs with grey on the stencil: parts that are scraped through the orange skin but not all the way, so they glow softly. A vegetable peeler or a clay loop tool does it.
7. Lights out (kid). First a grown-up checks the battery door is screwed shut. Then put the LED tea light in, turn off the room lights, and look.

Each design's page on the Pumpkin Patch shows these steps with a little moving picture for each, and a Lights out button that darkens the room and lights the cut parts from inside, so a child can see the glow before anyone touches the pumpkin.

How to use a pumpkin carving stencil

• Print at 100%, not "fit to page". The Pumpkin Patch's stencils come in three sizes: Small (5 inches across), Medium (7.2 inches) on one letter page, and Big (9.5 inches) across two pages with a line to tape them together. A 1-inch square on the page lets you check the printer didn't shrink it.
• Black is cut, grey is scraped, dots are poked or drilled. A dashed line is the lid.
• Leave the bridges. A bridge is a little strip of skin left in a cut line so a middle piece (the

inside of an O, a bat's body in the moon) doesn't fall out. On the stencils it's a white gap across a line, and the grown-up's note says where they are.
• Pick a smooth side. Tape the stencil to the flattest, smoothest face of the pumpkin; a few snips into the paper's edges help it lie flat on the curve.

Easy pumpkin carving ideas for kids

The easiest designs to carve are big, simple shapes with no small pieces to break: triangles, circles, wide smiles. The Pumpkin Patch's Easy carve set has thirteen, for ages 5 and up with a grown-up cutting:

- Faces: classic grin, toothy triangles, sleepy face, surprised face, winking face, kissy face, wiggly smile
- Silly ones: one-eyed monster, three-eyed alien, Mister Moustache
- Eyes that make the face: heart eyes, star eyes
- No face at all: the polka-dot pumpkin, all drilled holes

For something a step up, the Medium set adds animals and characters that are all our own drawings: a cute vampire, Peabody the owl, a skeleton grin, BOO! and your first letter, A to Z.

Can't choose? The face maker lets kids build their own jack-o'-lantern face from 12 eyes, 8 noses, 13 mouths and extras like eyebrows, freckles, a tooth gap or a witch's hat, then try Lights out and print it.

No-carve pumpkin ideas for the littlest

For toddlers and preschoolers, a no-carve pumpkin is the whole fun with none of the knife. An uncut pumpkin also usually lasts much longer than a carved one, so it can go out early in October. Use washable paint, give each child their own small pumpkin, paint the base color first and let it dry before the details.

A few from the pumpkin painting ideas for kids page: candy corn stripes, mummy wraps, a galaxy pumpkin, a unicorn, a googly-eye monster, a ladybug, a sunflower and a pumpkin in a paper witch's hat. The no-carve designs print a color guide instead of a stencil.

One caution: googly eyes and other small stick-ons can choke a child under 3. A grown-up sticks them on and puts the spares away.

Light it with an LED, never a candle

The AAP suggests a battery-operated candle, a flashlight or a glow stick instead of a real flame, and says not to put candlelit pumpkins where visitors walk. Every carved design on the Pumpkin Patch says the same: an LED stays cool and can't start a fire, which matters with costumes and little hands nearby.

Most LED tea lights run on a coin battery, so check the light before a child handles it. A

grown-up checks the battery door is screwed shut, and never uses one a child can open. In August 2026 the CPSC recalled a set of LED tea lights because children could easily reach the batteries, and Consumer Reports found tea-light compartments very easy to pop open. For the youngest, use a small flashlight that takes AA or AAA batteries. A grown-up changes the battery and keeps the spares out of reach. A swallowed button or coin battery is an emergency; the AAP explains what parents need to know about button and coin batteries.

Save the seeds

Don't throw the seeds out with the goop. First, count them: lay them out in groups of ten and see how many tens one pumpkin held (the Pumpkin Patch has a seed counter and a printable counting mat, and there's more pumpkin math in Halloween math and reading at home). Then roast them: Peabody's roasted pumpkin seeds recipe has a picture for every step, with the oven steps marked for a grown-up. Pumpkin seeds are a choking risk for children under 4, so the little ones get something else.

Got a second pumpkin? The Workshop's pumpkin volcano fizzes over the top (a grown-up cuts the lid for that one too), and there are more Halloween crafts and experiments beside it. For everything else Halloween to make, read and play, there's Halloween HQ, and the free library has spooky-cute stories for while the pumpkin glows.

Questions parents ask

What age can kids carve pumpkins?

Young children shouldn't use a knife at all. The AAP's advice is that adults do the cutting and small children decorate with markers and help scoop. From about 5, kids can scoop, draw the face and poke a stencil's dots with a grown-up beside them. On the Pumpkin Patch, every cut stays a grown-up's at every age.

What's the easiest pumpkin to carve with kids?

A face made of big shapes: triangle eyes, a round nose, a wide smile. The classic grin, toothy triangles and surprised face are the easiest on the Pumpkin Patch. Avoid thin lines and small islands until you've done a few.

Do I need a pumpkin carving kit?

Not really. A big spoon or ice-cream scoop for the inside, a serrated knife for the lid, and a small pumpkin saw for the face are the useful parts. A pumpkin poker helps kids transfer a stencil, and a thick pin works too.

What can toddlers do with a pumpkin?

Wipe it, paint it, stick on big stickers, scribble on it with washable markers, and help scoop if they like squishy things. Keep googly eyes and other small bits away from children under 3.

Are the pumpkin stencils free?

Yes. All 52 designs, the stencils and the face maker are free through the end of 2026, to print at home or in a classroom, with no sign-up. Faces made in the face maker stay on your device.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-to-carve-a-pumpkin-with-kids