

Plymouth Police and Fire Departments

Home Alone Workshop

Is your child ready to be home alone?



Many children across America let themselves in or out of empty houses and supervise themselves for an hour or more each day. When deciding upon becoming a “home alone” family, the age of the child is not the only consideration. Some children might function well at home alone, while others might not be ready to assume the responsibility of self-care.

In order to be left alone, a child should want to assume the responsibility, should not be afraid to stay alone, should be able to follow directions and should be able to solve problems independently. Factors such as the amount of time the child will be alone, the accessibility of a parent or another adult in case of emergency and how safe the neighborhood is, should also be taken into consideration.

Suggestions for Self-Care:

Here are some guidelines to consider when making the decision to leave your child home. If you have questions concerning your decision, Hennepin County Child Protection Screening can assist you, 612-348-3552. Leaving a child home alone or assigning responsibility to care for younger children earlier than they are ready, sets the family up for failure. Home Alone programs are win/win situation for parents and for children when the timing is right.

- Children ages 8, 9, and 10 can be left home alone for traditional Home Alone hours under certain circumstances (before and after school).
- Children younger than ten should not supervise younger children.
- Children 11-14 may baby-sit with the expectation that an adult will return later in the day.
- Children 15 and older may baby-sit for more than 24 hours.

Signs of Readiness to be Home Alone

Is your child physically ready to stay home alone?

- Can they lock and unlock doors and windows?
- Are they able to perform everyday tasks such as fixing sandwiches, dialing the telephone, and writing messages?

Is your child mentally ready to stay home alone?

- Can they remember and follow rules on their own?
- Can they understand what “stranger” and “emergency” mean?
- Can they tell time?
- Can they solve small problems on their own, but know when and where to get help?
- Can they consider their actions affect others?

Is your child socially ready to stay home alone?

- Can they solve conflicts with brothers and sisters?
- Can they talk easily to you about what happens at school and about his or her feelings?
- Will they be confident enough to contact an adult if necessary?

Is your child emotionally ready to stay home alone?

- Does he or she feel confident and secure when home alone?
- Does he or she seem willing to stay home alone?
- Does he or she know how to handle fear, loneliness, or boredom?
- Does he or she know how to handle responsibility?

Take the “Family Size-Up” Quiz

Think about the following statements. Using a scale from 1 to 5, one the lowest five being the highest, rate each question.

1. How comfortable does your child feel about being on their own?
1 2 3 4 5
2. How comfortable are they being in the house home alone?
1 2 3 4 5
3. How well does your child know, understand, and follow your house rules?
1 2 3 4 5
4. How well does your child follow rules without being reminded of them?
1 2 3 4 5
5. How well does your child understand that there will be consequences if house rules are not followed?
1 2 3 4 5
6. How well is your child able to use common sense when dealing with most situations?
1 2 3 4 5
7. How self-motivated and responsible is your child?
1 2 3 4 5
8. How well is your child able to entertain himself/herself in their free time?
1 2 3 4 5
9. How close in close proximity is your house to a trusted neighbor or relative?
1 2 3 4 5
10. How strong are your child’s medical, physical, or emotional needs?
1 2 3 4 5

Preparing the Nest ... Is Your Home Ready for Your Home Alone Child?

- Are emergency numbers posted and readily available at each phone?
- Do you use a land line phone or cell phone at home? If 9-1-1 is called on a land line, the dispatcher will know the address from which the call was made. If 9-1-1 is dialed on a cell phone, the State Patrol will receive the call and will not know the location from which the call was made. Children need to know their home address.
- Have you asked a trusted neighbor, friend or family member to be an emergency back up for your family?
- Have you established an emergency password for your family?
- Have you provided a copy of your house rules to all of your emergency back-ups?
- Do you have a home fire escape plan and have you practiced it as a family?
- Is your house stocked with foods that your children likes and can easily and safely prepare?
- Have you given clear instructions on which appliances can and can not be used?
- Are matches and lighters kept away from children and stored in a safe and secure place?
- Are medicines stored in a safe and secure place?
- Are all guns in the home locked up and stored separate from ammunition?



- Do you have a flashlight with batteries that work? Will it be easy to find during an emergency?
- Do you have a well-stocked first aid kit?
- Do you have locks on ground and first floor windows? Can your child operate them?
- Do you have smoke alarms on each level of your home? Do you test them monthly and replace their batteries once a year?
- Do you have carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home? Do you test them monthly and replace their batteries once a year?
- Are all stairways clear of clutter?
- Are gasoline, lighter fluid, and other combustibles stored outside of home in a secure place away from children?
- Have you discussed internet safety as a family?
 - Put family computer in a common room. The computer monitor should face out toward the room rather than toward the wall.
 - Maintain access to your child's online accounts (e.g. e-mail, blogs, my space, facebook). Let your child know that you will randomly check them.
 - Use parental control or blocking software. While these can be useful tools, they should not be the only resource used to protect your children when they are online. Software should never take the place of parental monitoring and conversations between you and your teen.
 - Create your own profile if you are concerned about a specific social networking website. This will "open more doors for you" in the website and give you a better idea of what your child is seeing and reading.
 - Remind all children that they should never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone that they meet online, post personal pictures, share identifying information or download materials from an unknown source.

Setting House Rules for Home Alone Children

No matter how mature your child acts, he or she is still a child. Children invariably make mistakes; they don't always react in a situation as you wish they would. Give your children lots of encouragement, support, and reinforcement and treat their mistakes as learning experiences instead of failures.

Show them how much you appreciate their helpfulness, self-reliance, and cooperation while you are away.

Basic Rules: Keep rules simple and clear.

1. Keep house, service door, and garage overhead doors closed and locked at all times.
2. House is to be locked at all times. Do not unlock the door for anyone.
3. Keep the house key out of sight.
4. Check-in with your parents or a neighbor immediately after arriving home from school.
5. No one is allowed in the house without your parent's permission.
6. Never play with matches, lighters, or candles.
7. Never play with sharp objects or your parent's tools.
8. Never take medication /drugs unless a trusted adult gives them to you.
9. Never touch a gun. Tell a parent or trusted neighbor if you find a gun.
10. If a smoke detector sounds, everyone must leave the house and go to the outdoor meeting place. Ask a neighbor to dial 9-1-1.
11. You must always call to get your parent's permission before you leave your home or yard. If a friend invites you over to their house, you can not go unless your parents have given you permission to go.

12. If you are uncomfortable or frightened you should call a parent, trusted neighbor/relative, or 9-1-1.
13. Children should not talk to others about being left home alone. Not only is it a temptation to visit, but a careless word could alert others who might be unwelcome visitors.

Think about some additional rules:



Where can your child play?

- Can child play outside while he or she is home alone?
- Can child leave yard while he or she is home alone?
- Where can child ride his/her bike when he is home alone?



If the phone rings at home, what should your child do?

- Answer it but never tell them you are home alone. Saying...“My mom is taking a bath.” “My dad is asleep and will call back.” Answer it but never tell them you are home alone.
- Don't answer it and let it go to voicemail.



If someone knocks on the door or rings the doorbell, what should your child do?

- Answer it.
- Peek out the window and make decision whether or not to open it.
- Don't answer it. Stay out of view and do not answer it.



- If school is in session, when is homework to be completed?**
- What are the time limits on the telephone?**
- What can child watch on TV, use the compute, and talk on the telephone? What are the time limits?**
- For homes with pets, what are your child's responsibilities for them?**
- What are acceptable snacks or meals? What food can kids make and eat? Can they use a microwave or stove?**

Readiness Activities to Practice with Your Child

- Carrying a house key in a safe place (inside a shirt pocket or sock). Do not hide key under a mat or on a ledge outside the house.
- Looking at home first before unlocking and entering it.
- Locking doors and closing overhead garage doors.
- Calling a parent to check in when he/she first arrives home.
- Calling a trusted neighbor or family member in case of an emergency. Dialing 9-1-1 from an unplugged phone.
- Saying “no” to a friend if they ask to come over.
- Taking messages off of the answering machine. Record a message and play it for your child. Have them write down the message.
- Telling time to see if your child knows the difference between a.m. and p.m.
- Making nutritious snacks: sandwiches, cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, milk, juice, etc.
- Taking care of pets.
- Finding and using a flashlight in case of a power outage.
- Sounding smoke detectors and practicing your family's fire escape plan.

Freebies and Downloadable Safety Information & Activity Sheets



Unintentional injuries kill and disable more children than crime, drugs, and disease combined. They are the #1 health risk facing school age children today. These websites are excellent. Visit them to get complimentary curriculum, educational ideas, coloring books, and parent/children activities. **Most material is free and can be reproduced.**



**GREAT NEW WEBSITE: www.echominnesota.org
Safety and injury prevention information in six languages!**

★ www.netzsmartz.org

www.homesafetycouncil.org

www.amberstick.org

www.imsafe.org

www.mcgruff.org

www.nfpa.org

www.sparky.org

www.ncpc.org

www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us

www.safe-a-rooni.org

www.buckleupamerica.org

www.safekids.org

www.riskwatch.org

www.fema.gov

www.usfa.dhs.gov

www.ag.state.mn.us/Publications/order.asp

www.chop.edu/traumalink/download/2004/pcps_cpsreport.pdf

(Child Passenger Safety, Booster Seat Information)

www.wiredsafety.org

www.mediafamily.org

8 Leading Causes of Childhood Injury or Death

1. Motor vehicle crashes
2. Fires & burns
3. Choking, suffocation, strangulation
4. Poisoning
5. Falls
6. Unintentional firearms
7. Bike & pedestrian hazards
8. Drowning



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