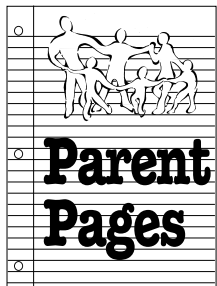


Tips For Parents and Their Latchkey Children



As many as 5-12 million children under the age of 13 are latchkey children -- home alone or with siblings after school for several hours each day. Parents should be aware that children in self-care are about three times more likely than those supervised by adults to be involved in accidents, engage in delinquent behavior, or be victimized. Some children enjoy

being independent and in charge, while others are lonely, bored or scared.

Cornell Cooperative Extension believes that young school-age children should not be left unsupervised for extended periods. However, parents may not always have other options available. There may be no family members or neighbors capable of providing care. Organized school-age child care - in day care centers, schools, community centers or churches - may not be available, accessible or affordable.

The fact sheet *When Can Children Be Left Home Alone?* (HD 7) can help you determine whether or not your child is mature and capable enough to stay home alone. Use the questions to evaluate your child's readiness for self-care. In addition, you should consider the following factors:

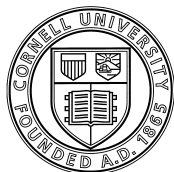
- ◆ Is your home safe and secure?
- ◆ Is your neighborhood safe?
- ◆ How long will your child be home alone each day?
- ◆ Is there a place your child can go for help if needed?
- ◆ Does your child have special medical, physical or emotional needs?
- ◆ Is your family going through a stressful time?



If you decide that your son or daughter is ready to stay home alone, the following recommendations will improve the experience.

1. Make sure your child understands why you can't be present.
2. Encourage him to express his feelings and concerns.
3. Provide a way she can contact you, a neighbor or relative when she arrives home, in an emergency, or just to hear a caring voice.
4. Teach her how to protect herself. Help her learn the following rules:
 - ◆ Go straight home from school without delay.
 - ◆ Walk with friends.

~Continued~



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- ◆ Don't enter the house if anything seems wrong, like an open door or broken window.
 - ◆ Once in the house, re-lock the door. Always keep the door locked when you are in the house.
 - ◆ Don't open the door to a stranger. Don't let anyone enter the house without prior approval.
 - ◆ Never tell anybody at the door or on the phone that you're home alone. Say that your mother can't come to the door or phone right now and you'll take a message. Better yet, do not answer the door at all and use an answering machine to screen phone calls.
5. Establish clear and specific home-alone rules and guidelines about such things as television viewing, homework, snacks and cooking, friends visiting, playing outside, etc.
 6. Review and rehearse emergency procedures with him until he feels comfortable.
 - ◆ Have a fire escape plan. Remind him that it's most important to get out of the house. He shouldn't try to rescue toys or pets or fight the fire.
 - ◆ Have him practice dialing emergency numbers and what to say. Keep a list of emergency numbers next to each telephone. Remind him not to hang up until told to do so.
 - ◆ Make sure he knows his phone number, home address and cross streets.
 - ◆ Teach him basic first aid.
 - ◆ Show him what to do if the lights or electrical power go out.
 7. Practice problem-solving situations. Ask her: What you would do if...
 - ◆ the dog jumps over the fence and you can't leave the yard?
 - ◆ you cut your finger?
 - ◆ you drop a glass that breaks and you're barefoot?
 - ◆ you miss your school bus home?
 8. Safety-proof your home by eliminating accident hot-spots and other hazards, maintaining safety equipment in working condition, preparing a first aid kit and compiling list of emergency numbers.
 9. Have a back-up plan if your child loses her house key.
 10. Make an emergency kit for your child. Put an extra key, money and emergency phone numbers in his schoolbag.
 11. Leave your child little surprises like notes or treats hidden around the house. Leave her a cassette tape of your voice, telling her what to do and how much you love her.
 12. Praise him when he demonstrates responsibility.
 13. Be aware that there is a fine line between responsible self-care and neglect.

Source: Tim Jahn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.