

## Home Alone-Safety Tips for Parents and Children

### Home alone safety

The decision to allow a child to stay home alone should be made on an individual basis, based on the child's maturity and comfort level (although generally no child under the age of eight should be left alone for any period of time).

### Latchkey Children

In this day and age, "latchkey children," are common.

The term refers to school aged children who return home after school to an empty house to care for themselves until mom and dad return home from work.

They carry house keys to let themselves into their homes.

This is a big responsibility for a child and

one which parents need to adequately prepare him/her for.

As a parent, you are in the best situation to assess your child's readiness to take on the responsibility of staying home alone.

It is best to start leaving the child alone for very short periods of time, perhaps 15-20 minutes to evaluate their readiness.

If they seem to do well and are comfortable being left alone for short periods, you might want to slowly increase the time period of your outings up to 1-2 hours for children twelve and under.

### Safety tips for parents

While teaching your child safety rules for staying home alone, it is important to stress the importance of the safety rules, without unnecessarily instilling fear.

Post a list of emergency numbers including family members, trusted friends and neighbors, and emergency personnel.

Make sure your child knows his/her phone number and address. Write these on the list of important numbers.

It is very easy for anyone, especially a child, to panic in an emergency.

If included on the list, your child can easily read aloud to a 911 operator in case of emergency.

Keep a first aid kit in the house.

Teach your child basic first aid.

Make sure there are working smoke detectors on every floor of the house and teach your child what to do in case of fire.

Practice fire evacuation routes with your children.

Keep a flashlight and batteries in an

easily accessible place in case of power outage.

Show your child where to find it.

Make sure that your child has a way to contact you when you are away from the home, including a cell phone and/or work number.

Check your messages often and promptly return your child's calls.

Limit the kind of cooking that can be done absent adult supervision.

Call and check on your child.

Always call and let them know if you are running late.

### Safety tips for children

Never let anyone into the house. Do not open the door to strangers.

Use caller id or an answering machine to screen calls.

When answering the phone, never tell callers you are home alone.

Tell them your mom/dad is busy and will call them back.

Keep all doors and windows locked.

If coming home to an empty house – never enter the house if there are open or broken windows or doors, or other signs of forced entry.

Leave and get help from a trusted neighbor.

Stay in the house until parents return home.

Do not invite friends over.

Tell parents of any fears or concerns.

There are whole host of additional considerations when the child is responsible for not only him or herself, but also a younger sibling or neighbor.