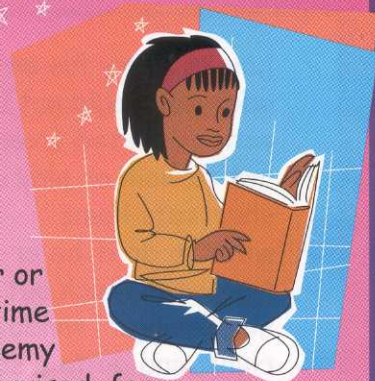


KNOW THE RULES...

After-School Safety for Children Who Are Home Alone

Each day millions of children go to an empty home and are alone for an hour or more. Experts estimate that nearly 5 million school-aged children spend time without adult supervision during a typical week.¹ Although the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that school-aged children, ages 5-12, be supervised, for many parents this isn't possible. When faced with this situation, the AAP states that maturity — not age — should be the determining factor in whether a child should be left alone.²



There are a number of important points parents should consider prior to allowing their child to be unsupervised after school. Parents need to assess their child. Does he or she have the personality, self-confidence, and judgment skills to accept this responsibility? Will the experience be positive and help build and enhance the child's self-image, or will the experience promote additional anxiety in the child who may be afraid to stay alone? Having a family conference to discuss the arrangement is a good place to start. House rules, expectations of both parent and child, and a daily routine can be defined. At the end of the day, parents can also use the experience to have regular family meetings to help ensure that the arrangement is still working and identify any alterations that need to be made. Here are some steps that you and your children can take to help ensure a positive after-school experience.

Before allowing your child to go home alone, you should...

- * determine if there are other community resources or organizations providing after-school care or support.
- * ask your child how he or she feels about being alone. Is your child afraid to be left alone, or does he or she have the maturity and initiative to want to assume that responsibility?
- * decide if you feel that your child can follow directions and solve problems on his or her own.
- * determine how long your child will be alone, how accessible you or another trusted adult will be in case of an emergency, and how safe the neighborhood is by contacting your local law-enforcement agency and checking the incidence of crime in your neighborhood.
- * make sure you've set specific rules that are to be followed by your child while he or she is alone and give your child specific instructions on how to reach you at all times. This should also include information on what to do if your child needs assistance and can't reach you right away.
- * remember that you're in charge, even if it is from a distance.

Once you've decided to proceed, you should check to make sure your child knows...

- ✓ his or her full name, address, and telephone number.
- ✓ your full name, the exact name of the place where you work, your work telephone number, and any pager or cellular telephone numbers that you may have.
- ✓ how to make a telephone call to request help in an emergency using **911** or the appropriate number(s) in your area.



