

# Home Alone...Tips for Leaving Kids Safely

Generally, children under 10 years of age should not be left alone. According to the Child and Family Services Act, any child under 10 years, left alone, is automatically considered to be at risk. The onus is on the parent to prove reasonable provision for supervision and care was being provided. Under the Child and Family Services Act, a fine of up to \$1000 and/or up to one year in jail can be imposed if found guilty.

When preparing a child to stay at home, the child's maturity level should be taken into account. The younger the child, the shorter time they should be home alone. The minimum age recommended for babysitting is 12, though not every kid will be ready at this age. Consider also the child's comfort level. A child who is afraid or uncomfortable should not be left alone.

Children should not be left alone for long periods of time and not overnight. Young children should not have to care for other children. Kids should not be expected to care for a baby until they are into their teens and have had some training or experience with babies. Kids can be taught to prepare simple snacks on their own but should not be expected to cook meals. A babysitting course is advisable.

## What a Child Home Alone Should Know

- ◆ Where the parent/caregiver is going, and when they will be back
- ◆ Their own full name, age, address and phone number and when it is appropriate to give out that information to others (e.g in the case of calling 911)
- ◆ What to do in an emergency - includes understanding what an emergency is (use examples)
- ◆ Rules of the house (include having friends over, playing outside, using amenities such as the pool)
- ◆ Location of emergency exits, fire extinguishers and first aid kit
- ◆ How to use keys in deadlocks and how to unbolt them

## Children Home Alone Should Have

- ◆ A list of emergency contacts (including someone in the neighbourhood)
- ◆ Snacks or prepared food available
- ◆ Small amount of money (for taxis, emergencies, etc)



## Prepare Your Child

- ◆ Sit down with your child and create a list of house rules. Include rules about guests, answering the phone and door. Decide which appliances children can use and teach them how to operate them safely. (For example, they may be restricted from using the stove but permitted to use the microwave or toaster.)
- ◆ Explain what an emergency is and practice what to do in different scenarios.
- ◆ Do regular check-ins or designate a neighbour or family member who can call to check on your child. Not only is this a good safety practice, it is easy for a child home alone to become lonely or frightened.

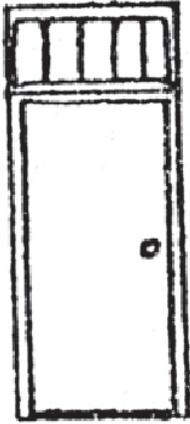
## Additional Tips

- ◆ Be careful with house keys. Children shouldn't wear a key in a way that someone can see it.
- ◆ Children should not wear their names on their clothing. When kids hear someone use their name, they often believe it's a signal for safety.
- ◆ Do not enter the house if anything seems different than usual when you arrive home (e.g. if the door is unlocked or a window is open). Go to a designated neighbour's house for help.
- ◆ Keep emergency numbers in plain view of the telephone.



# Home Alone...Tips for Leaving Kids Safely

## Answering the Door



- ◆ Keep the door closed and locked at all times.
- ◆ If someone knocks, look through the peephole or window to see who is there.
- ◆ Never tell a visitor you are home alone. Say your parents are busy and can't come to the door.
- ◆ If you choose to talk to someone at the door, talk through the closed door. Don't open the door. Keep it locked. Keep the conversation short even if the visitor tries to talk to you. If you're not sure what to do or say, don't say anything.
- ◆ Don't let anyone in the house, unless your parents said it was okay for this person to come in. Otherwise, don't let anyone in, even if you know them.
- ◆ If the person will not go away or tries to get in the house, call 911 immediately.
- ◆ No one should be allowed in the house when the parents aren't home under any circumstances unless previous permission is granted by parents. The same rules about guests should also apply to babysitters.

## Answering the Phone

- ◆ When answering the phone, children should never give their name. Just say, "Hello". If a caller asks a child their name, just ask the caller whom they wish to speak to.
- ◆ No matter what, never give your address over the phone, unless calling 911 in an emergency.
- ◆ Do not answer questions asked by a stranger over the phone.
- ◆ If a stranger calls and asks, "What number is this?", do not tell them.
- ◆ Never tell a caller anything about yourself, including who is home. Instead, say your parents are busy and can't come to the phone. Take a message.
- ◆ If someone on the phone says something mean or scary, continues to ask questions, or bother you in any way, hang up the phone immediately. If they continue to call back, call for help.

## Practice with your child

Try using the 'broken record' technique for persistent callers.



- I'm not allowed to give that information over the phone.*
- My mom/dad can't come to the phone right now. May I take a message?*
- I'm not supposed to give my name over the phone.*
- I'm not supposed to answer questions over the phone.*
- I'm sorry I can't answer any questions. I can only take a message.*
- I'm sorry, I can't stay on the phone any longer. I am going to hang up now.*