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home alone

HOME ALONE PLAN FOR PARENTS

Safety with others

Protecting children from sexual abuse and child abduction are very important to each family's home alone plan. Teach your child basic safety rules, but avoid talking about "stranger danger." Research tells us that in most instances a child is well acquainted with the offender. In other words, that person is not a stranger to the child. When we tell a child "never talk to a stranger," we are eliminating a source of help if the child is in trouble.

Instead, speak to your child openly and in a manner that is calm and non-threatening. This approach helps to build the child's confidence to stay safe in a potentially dangerous situation. Remember that fear can be paralyzing to a child.

General safety guidelines

Here are general safety guidelines to teach children.

- Always check with a parent or trusted adult before going anywhere, accepting anything, or getting into a car.
- Always take a friend when going places or playing outside.
- Say no if someone tries to touch you or treats you in a way that makes you scared, uncomfortable, or confused. Leave the situation.
- Tell a parent or trusted adult if you feel scared or uncomfortable.
- There will always be someone to help you. You have a right to be safe.

Keep in mind that children will benefit from practicing these ideas over time. Look for opportunities to reinforce safety skills such as an incident in the community or the news. Discuss "What would you do if…?" scenarios. Safety skills with positive messages will help keep children safe.

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Safety with others at home

Children often start self-care for short periods after school. This may mean letting themselves into the home. Here are guidelines that many families follow.

Getting into the home

- Check that the home is locked. If there are open doors or there is broken glass, do not enter. Instead, go to a neighbor's house so an adult can check or call the police.
- If the house looks normal, unlock the door. Take the key out of the door and relock the door from inside.
- Give an extra key to a neighbor, in case you get locked out. Never hide the keys outside. Families in the country with no neighbors may need other plans.

Answering the door

- Never open the door.
- Ask who is at the door. Look through the viewer if possible. Some families choose not to have children answer the door.
- Never let a visitor know you are alone. Don't give information about family members' schedules. If a visitor asks for help, direct the visitor to an adult.

Answering the telephone

The telephone represents a lifeline to information, help, and comfort for a child when alone. Children also need to learn how to respond appropriately to callers.

- Begin by saying only "hello."
- Provide no information to the caller. Do not tell anyone you are alone.
- Avoid lying. A statement such as "My father can't come to the phone right now" represents a truthful statement.
- Offer to take a message.
- When faced with persistent questioning, hang up and call a parent or trusted adult.

Practice with your child

1. Pretend you are a salesperson and want to check a delivery date.
2. Pretend you are a school counselor and want to verify school records.
3. Pretend you are an old friend of the family in town for only a few hours.

When it comes to safety issues, research shows that children learn little from discussions alone, unless practice is included. When children practice these skills, they are much more likely to remember them and really use them when needed.