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home alone

HOME ALONE PLAN
FOR PARENTS

Developing your family's plan

A road map or GPS system are helpful tools to get the family where they need to be when taking a trip. In the same way, developing a home alone plan is an important tool for families preparing for self-care. The children need to know what they can and cannot do. The parents need to know that their children are safe and successfully managing their time when they are home alone. Four important pieces or issues that make up the home alone plan are:

- Following family rules
- Structuring time when home alone
- Handling emergencies
- Dealing with boredom

Families must discuss and decide how they want the children to handle these issues. Each family will be unique.

Why family rules?

Yes, families do rule, but when children are home alone, knowing the rules or guidelines will help them know what to do and how to feel safe. Getting to "I know how to handle this" takes some work. Start by discussing situations that could happen when children are home alone. Discuss how to handle the situations and come up with family rules or guidelines to help the children understand what to do in these situations. Put these rules on your refrigerator or bulletin board to help everyone remember. If a rule does not work, talk again as a family and change the rule as needed.

Parents can help by using the following guidelines in discussing family rules:

State the family rules clearly, including the behavior you expect.

"Be good" or "Clean the house" are not clear enough. Be more specific. For example: "No playing outside until your room is picked up." If you define the rule and what behavior you expect, children in self-care follow rules better. They know exactly what to do and when.

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Explain the reason for the rule.

Reasons also help children make wise decisions in new situations. Knowing the reason for a rule increases your child's understanding of the situation. Families need to discuss situations that will happen when the child is home alone and how to handle them. Parents will see how the child thinks in a new situation. Sometimes children do know the best way to handle the situation. Other times, parents need to explain why there is a better way. Each family will have their own rules to follow in their family's home alone plan.

Clearly state the consequences for not following a rule.

Once a rule is made, discuss the consequences of not following the rule. A child who understands the penalty is more likely to follow the rule. When children are given an opportunity to help establish a consequence, they are more likely to understand and follow the family rule.

Consistently enforce the rules.

When the rules are enforced consistently, they are more likely to be followed. It can be confusing to children when rules are enforced some of the time but not all of the time. It's better to have a few important rules rather than many inconsistent ones.

When children are home alone, they need to follow the rules that family members identified. Children in self-care who know the rules and can follow them will be able to handle most self-care situations.

Remember: Rules are followed best when…

- they are stated clearly.
- the children understand the reason for the rules.
- the consequences for not following the rules are understood.
- these consequences are consistently enforced.

Helpful ideas

Post the family rules where everyone can see them.

Write down the rules and post them in a place where everyone can see them. Your child can refer to this list as a reminder of agreed rules. Rules can be added to or changed when the family discusses and reviews them. Review the rules weekly to start with and then monthly as the rules become more familiar.

Children may push against rules as they gain skill and maturity.

As the children grow and become more experienced in their self-care, the rules may need to be changed. Apply the above suggestions as you think about changing a family rule.