

Legally speaking...

Did you know?

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Subject: Family

CHILDREN HOME ALONE: SAFETY PRACTICES

Some parents find that older school age children begin to insist on coming home after school at about age 10. As a result many kids are staying home on their own for a few hours till their parents get home. Each individual family has to make a careful assessment of their child's readiness to assume responsibility for his/her own care at home and have a well thought out plan of action for the child's safety.

Here are a few safety practices for you to consider before you leave your child home alone:

1. Ease your child into the situation gradually. Have your child stay home on his/her own for short periods of time to prepare him/her.
2. Your child should know his name, address, and phone number. Your child must know how to get in touch with you at work. Knowing the name and number of a trusted neighbour is also helpful.
3. Your child should know when and how to call 911.
4. Post emergency numbers in a visible place near all the phones in your home.
5. Set up some kind of a routine to let you know that your child is safe at home. Ask him/her to call you or set up a specific time that you will call him/her.
6. Establish house rules and make sure your child is comfortable with them. These should include some common guidelines such as: Do not answer the door. Let the answering machine pick up the phone. No friends over.

7. Specify how his/her time is to be spent.
8. Prepare a snack or meal for your child in advance.

Keep in mind that while you may feel two hours after school is manageable for your child, you may still need to make other arrangements for longer periods of time, such as early dismissal days, winter and spring breaks, and the long months of summer holidays. Sometimes, some children who stay home on their own experience some fear, chronic loneliness, depression and poor school performance. You need to consider these factors against the cost of licensed child care or a neighbour you can pay to look after your child until you get home from work. You need to do an assessment for yourself to see what works best for your family.

For More Information

- 1) Canada Safety Council at www.safety-council.org. To prepare children to be on their own, they have a booklet entitled **At Home On My Own**, which focuses on how to prevent problems, handle real-life situations.
- 2) Check with your child's school or other community agencies serving families and their children regarding Home Alone Courses that are offered. These courses are usually geared to 10 years and up.
- 3) Fact Sheet: **Children Home Alone**
www.nscr.bc.ca.



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