

Are You Home Alone...



Written By:
Wayne County Children Services

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Wayne County Children Services wants to help make growing up a safe experience rather than a frustrating and dangerous time in our children's lives. We believe that better child supervision means a happier future for our children.

As the agency responsible in Wayne County for the investigation of child abuse/neglect, including inadequate child supervision, Wayne County Children Services is often called on to investigate situations where appropriate child supervision may be lacking. We often find that parents simply are not aware of potential problems in this area.

We hope the information in this brochure will help you make wise decisions about child supervision.

Most parents have to work to support their families. Sometimes this means their children come home to an empty house or apartment. If you're one of those parents or children, here are some things you should know.

AS THE PARENT...ASK YOURSELF

- 1) Are there specific interests my son/daughter has that they can participate in after school until I get off work? These may include sports, band or other school sponsored clubs like speech, chess, drama, art, yearbook, student councils, etc. When school is out, day camps or other supervision arrangements will be needed. See question #3.
- 2) Is there some responsible relative/adult I know well who can watch my child at my house, near their school, or during the summer? Make sure you really know them well. It doesn't hurt to check with the local police to make sure the person you're about to trust with your children doesn't have a criminal record.



Criminal convictions are public records and you should check these before trusting your child with them. Safe adult supervision is always better than leaving young children alone.

- 3) Are there agencies that might help with child care? Before deciding to leave your child home alone, check with your school, the Salvation Army, YMCA, Boys'/Girls' Club about before and after school programs. Many communities have them and the cost is reasonable. Your Department of Job & Family Services also supports many types of day care. They can give you a lot of information on what's available near you, the cost, and if you qualify for financial help. A great source of information is InfoLink at United Way of Wayne and Holmes Counties, 330-263-6363 or 1-800-247-9473.
- 4) **Is my child old enough and mature enough to be left home alone?** There are no laws which say how much supervision a child requires at a particular age. Parents are, however, responsible for the safety and protection of their child. We believe that parents should be cautious about their child's supervision. If you aren't sure your child can function safely without supervision, then you should make sure that the child is supervised. Before deciding, you should think about many types of risks your child may face when unsupervised:
- * The child may not be able to react appropriately when a crisis - such as a fire, illness, poisoning, a serious fall, etc. - occurs. A good question to ask yourself is whether your child can make split second decisions in an emergency.
 - * Children (especially siblings) tend to quarrel and fight when not supervised.
 - * Children at increasingly younger ages are becoming involved with tobacco, alcohol, other drugs, and/or become sexually active. This is more likely to happen when they lack adult supervision.
 - * Children who are unsupervised are more likely to leave the house, wander around and get into juvenile trouble. They may also begin to feel unloved or unwanted.

Children Services Child Supervision Guidelines

- * Children ages 6 and under never should be left alone with out direct supervision, even for a short time. If a child is unable to quickly find and talk in person to the parent or sitter, the child is unsupervised.
- * Children ages 7-11 never should be left home alone. These children may play independently for short periods of time. Adults should check on these children often to ensure their safety and be readily available if needed by the child.
- * **Children under 12 years old shouldn't be left home alone.**
- * Children 12 years old or older may be mature enough to be home alone for short periods of time, but even a 12 or 13 year old youth usually isn't mature enough to be responsible for younger siblings, especially an infant. We suggest that youth be at least 13 years of age or older to babysit siblings or other children. Remember...youth between 9 and 13 years of age are most likely to be tested by, and give in to peer pressure to engage in sexual activity, smoke tobacco or marijuana, or experiment with other drugs including alcohol, cocaine, etc. Ages 12-14 probably do not need a sitter if the parent is gone for a short time (a few hours) occasionally, but would need supervision (preferably by an adult) if the parent is gone regularly or for long periods (such as working). Ages 15/16 and up - most do not need a sitter. However, some children may need supervision, especially if they have physical, emotional or behavioral problems.



If you've answered yes to any of the first three questions, you can arrange for safe supervision of your child. If you answered no to question four, then you know your child isn't mature enough to be left home alone just yet and they need adult supervision.

If your child can safely stay at home alone, here are several tips to help you and them feel safer.



-Establish house rules and a routine. For example, have them call you as soon as they get home. This lets you know when they got home and that they are safe. Talking to each other reassures both of you. Tell them they are not considered “at home” until they have called you or someone you designate. You should always know where your children are.

-No one else is allowed in the house. Keep the door locked and don’t answer it if the doorbell rings. This includes your youth’s friends who might want to stop over. Make sure they understand that it’s not only strangers who might hurt them, but often someone we know, but maybe not real well.

-If they’re walking home be sure they know never to take “shortcuts” or to get into anyone’s car. They’re not to help someone “look for a lost puppy” or “ help a hurt friend.” They’re to walk together and go straight home by the walking route you’ve discussed and agreed to. If approached by a stranger, they should run away fast and yell “help” so loud it hurts their own ears! When they get somewhere safe, then have the oldest child call the police.

-If they’re walking home, tell them to walk as a group with other kids from your neighborhood, never alone. If you have several children walking home, have them walk home together. Put your oldest/most mature child “in charge” and tell them to stay together no matter what happens.



-If the phone rings, let the answering machine answer it. If they hear your voice, pick up the receiver. If not, let the caller leave a message. If you don't have an answering machine, they are to answer the phone, but **never say "My parents aren't home right now."** Instead, have them say **"My dad/mom can't come to the phone right now, can I take a message?"** Teach your child how to use the phone and the importance of knowing how to dial 911 in cases of emergencies. Discuss what an emergency might be. Practice having them answer the phone and you be the person calling to test their comfort and skill.

-Have important phone numbers posted by the phone. 911 is the most important number, followed by the numbers where they can reach you, relatives, a trusted neighbor, etc. Write them out and put them by each phone in your home.

-As part of your house rules, leave a "to do" list for each responsible child. On that list should be instructions about any chores, doing their homework, what is the plan for dinner, etc. If they're to eat without you, don't have them order delivery food like pizza because they'll have to open the door. Try to have food ready in advance that doesn't involve using knives, kitchen appliances and especially the stove. Most kitchen fires start from the stove.



-As part of the safety plan, discuss what they're to do in case of a fire. Generally the safest thing is to tell them to get out of the house immediately and dial 911 from a neighbor's house. They shouldn't try to put the fire out themselves. Prevent fires by locking up matches, flammable liquids, etc. Warn them about the danger of space heaters including kerosene heaters. If possible avoid using them or having your child attempt to make them work.

-What should happen if they come home and the door is already open or unlocked? What if she lost her key? **Tell them to never go into your house if the door is already opened or unlocked.** Your plan should have someone you've decided is safe who they can walk to and call you from for instructions. This could be a neighbor or a relative. Always have a spare key hidden someplace where they can reach it, but not too obvious for others to use.

-Make sure ALL guns are unloaded and locked up. If you own a gun, it needs to have the ammunition removed from the chamber and the magazine so it is really unloaded. It's best to lock the gun and ammunition up, putting them in different locations so young hands can't find, load and use the gun. You should also install trigger locks.

-Keep medications and other dangerous chemicals/liquids locked up or out of reach. If you take medications, be sure these are locked up or at least in a place where your children can't get into them. Other items to keep out of their reach are cleaners usually kept under the kitchen sink or in a bathroom and any beer, wine or hard liquor. Be sure lighters and matches are never in reach. A good rule is no one starts a fire for any reason! (i.e. lighting a candle, incense, gas stove burners, kerosene or electric heaters, etc.)



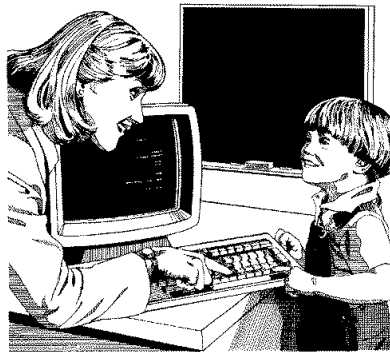
-Be sure to **have flashlights with good batteries in them around the house** in case of a power failure.

COMPUTER/INTERNET SAFETY

If your family has a computer at home, you need to discuss computer safety with your children and give them a set of on-line rules for their safety. Remember, home isn't the only place where your children will gain access to the Internet. Most likely they'll

have access at school, the library and at the homes of their friends. The rules you set as a family at home gives your child guidelines that they can then use in these other settings even if there is peer pressure to do otherwise.

What are the risks? The Internet puts at your child's fingertips the best and worst our society has to offer. A wealth of information and people from around the world can be reached from your computer. But just as there are great resources, the Internet also holds great dangers. Pedophiles and others who would sexually abuse children use the Internet to 'get to know' and meet children. Chat rooms are the most dangerous areas. The Internet is also the world's biggest shopping mall. Make sure your children know that they are not to share any personal or financial information over the Internet.



Basic Ground Rules

(For Parents)

-Educate Yourself About the Internet...You must get to know your way around the Internet because you're children are going to use it. One way to learn is to sit with your child and learn it together. Let them teach you and in the process, see how they're using it and the sites they visit.

Resources: Wayne County Schools Career Center Adult Education offers a class "Introduction to the Internet." Phone 330-669-9611 for more information.

-Set up Computer Safety, Blocking/Filtering Features

Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) probably has privacy policies and options. Find these out and use them. Avoid listing your child's name and e-mail address in any public directory. Software that can filter out violence, sexual content, etc., is available and there is a lot of it. It is not a substitute for your supervision and no software will filter out everything. Check out the following web site for examples; <http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/index.php>. Become familiar with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) which requires web sites that are directed toward children under 13 years of age to obtain parental permission before collecting many types of information. Go to www.ftc.gov/infosecurity which is the federal trade commission's web site. The Ohio Attorney General Division of Consumer Protection can be reached at 800-282-0515, or www.ag.state.oh.us.

(For Kids)

— **Never give out identifying information** –name, address, phone, date of birth, social security number, marital status, or your photo to anyone you don't know well and never in a public place such as a chat room. This also means not giving out financial information including credit card numbers, bank account numbers, etc. Set up a guideline on parental supervision for shopping on the Internet. Never give out your password.



–**Use a gender neutral name** for your e-mail, especially if you go into a chat room. Only go into chat rooms with your parent's permission. Remember –Whenever you e-mail, you give out your address and can get e-mail back whether you want it or not.

–Don't open e-mail from someone you don't know. "Spam" (junk e-mail) often contain links. Don't click on the links. There are dangers to downloading files that come as attachments. That is often how viruses are spread.

– Talk to your parents. Tell your parents if you access an Internet web site that makes you feel uncomfortable, especially if it contains sexually explicit pictures, descriptions, threatens you, etc. Keep talking with your parents about what you find on the Internet. When possible, navigate the net together with your parents.

–Never agree to meet anyone you've met over the Internet. Many people aren't who they say they are and you'll never know. If your parents approve of you meeting someone you've met over the Internet, discuss with your parents conditions for the meeting, get their permission and expect your parents to go with you. Make sure the meeting is in a public place with other people.

-Remember, everything you read on the Internet won't be true. If you're shopping on line and something is priced just too good to be true - it probably is. Likewise, the 16 year old new friend you've met in a chat room may be a much older adult.

Report web sites or e-mails that threaten your life, safety, or that contain child pornography or anything you think to be illegal to www.cybertipline.com.

Now that you think you're ready, go over this list again. Practice with your child what they're to do or say in certain situations. Try to have a trusted neighbor know your children are coming home alone and ask for their cooperation.

Below is a check list for parents to review with their children and a list for you to fill in with important phone numbers. Please take time to review the check list with your children before leaving them home alone. The important phone number list should be completed by the parent and left near each phone in your home.

PARENTS SAFETY CHECK LIST

- ___ Establish House Rules
- ___ No One Else Is Allowed In The House
- ___ Never Get Into A Stranger's Car
- ___ Always Walk Home In A Group
- ___ When Answering The Phone, Never Say "My Parents Aren't Home"
- ___ Post Important Phone Numbers Near The Phone
- ___ "To Do" List For Each Child
- ___ Don't Enter The House If The Door is Already Open or Unlocked
- ___ Guns Are Unloaded and Locked Up
- ___ Medications & Chemicals/Liquids Are Locked Up Or Out Of Reach
- ___ Flashlights Have Good Batteries And Are Within Reach
- ___ Discussed Computer/Internet Safety and Rules

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

911 - Emergency Assistance Phone Number

_____ Mom's phone number

_____ Dad's phone number

_____ Friend/neighbor's phone number

Wayne County Children Services

Protecting Children and
Strengthening Families
Since 1882



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Wayne County Children Services
2534 Burbank Rd., Wooster, OH 44691
Phone: 330-345-5340
www.waynecsb.org