

Resources

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CHILD SUPERVISION WAYNE COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES BOARD

Providing adequate supervision to your children is critical to their safety and healthy development. Every parent can take steps now to better protect young children and to help them develop in a healthy way. Deciding what supervision your child needs requires you to think about many factors. This handout discusses some considerations regarding child supervision. Specific guidelines are listed as well. These guidelines are followed by a few simple questions you can ask yourself which should help you in making the important decision of whether a child can safely be left at home without supervision.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no laws that say how much supervision a child requires at a particular age. However, parents are 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 might 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 alcohol & drugs. This is more likely to happen when they are left unsupervised.
- Children who are unsupervised are more likely to leave the house, wander around and get into trouble. They may feel unloved or unwanted.

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISION

The guidelines below are not set in concrete, but are probably not too strict for any child. The decision you make as a parent will be affected by the situation and your child's maturity.

AGES 6 AND UNDER: Never should be left alone without 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.

AGES 7 TO 10: Rarely, if ever, should be without direct supervision. Depending on the child's maturity and capability, as well as the situation, more mature children in this age group may be left alone for a very short time, usually 15 minutes or less.

AGES 11 TO 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 special needs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Below are some questions and issues for you to consider in deciding what supervision is adequate for your child.

1) ARE THERE ACCIDENTS THAT MIGHT BEFALL YOUR CHILD?

Dangers to avoid include locks that do not work, exposed wiring, space heaters that a small hand can reach or knock over, and matches within reach.

To minimize the risk of accidents you can walk through your house with your child and point out what things are “off limits”. You should explain to your child how and why these things could be harmful to them. Then ask your child why and let them give you answers. Generally, no child under 10 should be allowed to cook while unsupervised. Parents should provide food if they need to be absent during mealtime.

2) IS YOUR CHILD MATURE ENOUGH TO USE THE PHONE TO GET HELP?

If yes, is there an adult close to your house who your child can call for emergency help in the event a parent cannot be reached? Have your child practice calling and/or going to this person. Have a list of phone numbers taped by the phone or show your child how to access them on a mobile phone. Have your child practice calling these numbers and talking to the people while you listen. Also, remind your child when answering the phone he/she is NEVER to tell anyone he/she is alone, but simply that mom or dad is busy.

3) DOES YOUR CHILD KNOW HOW TO ESCAPE FROM YOUR HOME IN CASE OF FIRE?

Every child should know and practice an escape route from his home with parents at least once a month. Thus in the event of fire a child, whether asleep or alone in the house, will know by reflex where and how to escape danger.

4) DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE CLEAR RULES ABOUT LETTING ANYONE ELSE IN THE HOME IF HE IS ALONE?

Generally, it is safest if same age friends are not allowed to visit while adult supervision is absent. If you want to make exceptions, the rules should be clear. **Your child should never let strangers into the house when he is alone!!**

Explain carefully the risks of not following these rules; if they can understand reasons for rules, children are more likely to follow them.

5) WILL YOUR OLDEST CHILD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN?

If the answer is “YES”, you should be sure he/she could cope with potential emergencies and protect younger children as well as themselves. You should be sure that he/she is mature enough to provide the supervision the younger children need. Does this child understand he must not leave the younger children unattended?

6) HOW LONG WILL THE CHILD BE WITHOUT SUPERVISION?

There are no hard and fast rules, but in general, the longer you are gone, the greater the risk to your child. A child of 9 or 10 might be safely left alone for a few minutes but not for several hours. It is crucial for parents to carefully assess their child’s maturity and capability to safely care for themselves.

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 in Wayne County responsible 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 handout will be useful to you as parents.

If you have questions or would just like to talk something over – please call us. You can also call us 24 hours a day to report concerns of child abuse/neglect regarding any child that resides in Wayne County.

WAYNE COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES
2534 BURBANK ROAD
WOOSTER, OHIO 44691
(330) 345-5340
www.waynecsb.org

