



Parent Handout

Home Alone Safely Program

This is a one day workshop for children ages 8-11 years who may be home alone before or after school or occasionally for short periods of time. The topics covered include: establishing a routine, telephone and internet safety, stranger awareness, weather, basic first aid, fire safety, chemical safety, how to fight fears while home alone and additional safety topics.

- Course is 4.5 hours in length (including a 30 minute lunch break)
- **Parent or guardian participation is required for the first 30 minutes of the program**
- Children do need to bring their own lunch. A small healthy snack is provided (fruit and vegetables)

Objectives of the Program

- Identify parent and child expectations and ground rules for being home alone.
- Assist in the development of individual parent/child contracts to facilitate safety in being home alone.
- Help to develop strategies to prevent or cope with 'fears' about being home alone.
- Promote child accountability and responsibility while being home alone.
- Facilitate effective use of child's time when home alone.
- The program will provide information for children home alone, yet it always remains the parents decision whether the child has the maturity, responsibility and skills to be home alone in a safe and productive manner. It is recommended that parents and children communicate and share information about this course on an ongoing basis.

Is your child ready to stay home alone?

When considering whether or not your child is ready to stay home alone remember each child reacts to situations differently. A few questions to ask yourself:

- Has he/she handled brief periods of being left alone well?
- Will he/she come straight home after school?
- Will he/she be lonely or frightened when alone?
- Can he/she manage simple jobs like fixing a snack and taking phone messages?
- Does your child show good judgement?
- Does your child follow house rules?
- If you have more than one child, do they all get along together or do they fight amongst themselves?
- Does your child act appropriately to stressful situations?



Keep in Touch

Parents should keep in contact with the child while they are alone. Allow them to call you at work to check in or ask for advice. Give emotional support, let them know that you are available and that they are not without a support system.

Rules

Parents should establish rules and expectations for children who are home alone. Explaining rules to the child is very important. Are friends allowed in? Are they allowed to use the stove? Can they go outside? Do they answer the door and telephone? Discuss each and every rule, write them down, and post them for all to see.

Legal Responsibility

- The laws regarding welfare of children vary from province to province, so you should check with Child and Family Services in your area to find out about the provisions that apply to you and your family. There is no law in Alberta that specifies at what age children can be left alone. When considering leaving a child unsupervised, age and maturity are important factors in assessing whether care and supervision is adequate. Many Albertans expect families to arrange care or supervision for children left alone under the age of 12.
- If your child is under 12, you must judge whether your child is ready. Here are some guidelines to consider:
 - Determine the maturity level of your child. If you don't think that your child is ready or if your child doesn't feel ready to stay alone, it is important to find an alternative.
 - A reliable friend, neighbour, or relative should be available for your children. This may mean that the available adult can be reached by telephone and/or is within walking distance.
 - Determine how well you have prepared your child for being home alone.
 - Consider the time of day that you will be gone, and how long you will be gone for.
 - If your child needs to speak to you, you should be available by phone.
 - If a child suffers health problems and/or has a disability, the factors associated with leaving that child alone may be different. Consult with your doctor to determine appropriate action.
 - Do you have more than one child? If you have to leave siblings alone, consider if each child is ready to be left alone. Asking one child to look after another puts a lot of responsibility on that child. Also, sometimes when more than one child is left alone, the opportunity for mischief or trouble increases.