

Grande Prairie & Area Safe Communities

Home of Safety City

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safe communities™
grande prairie
& area

Injuries are preventable!



Home Alone Safety Program

Ages: 8 - 11 years

Parent Handout

Home Alone Safety 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. This program is also great for situations where you may be home but are not actively supervising children in this age group. (example: mowing the lawn, napping or other activities) 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 3 hours in length
- **Parent or guardian participation is required to complete Contact and Rules Contract together with child before attending class.**
- Children may bring snacks to the class if they choose. No sharing of snacks will be allowed.

Objectives of the Program

- Identify parent and child expectations and ground rules for being home alone.
- Identify and educate on key factors that create a safe environment 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 to enable them to stay safe while home alone. It is not an assessment of the child's ability or readiness, but provides safety knowledge that can help prepare children and build their confidence. It always remains the parent's decision whether the individual 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.

This program focuses on building skills for self-care in children. This is not the same as the babysitters course which is about learning to care for other younger children. Babysitting courses can be found through St. John Ambulance and Red Cross locally. It is not recommended for children under the age of 12 to care for other children.

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?

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- *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 understand how to use the home security system if you have one?*
- *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 and argue?*
- *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. Ensure that there are other trusted, reliable people the child can call for help and/or emotional support if you are not easily available.

Consider what options are available for your child to keep in touch with you and other adults. The options you chose may be different depending on your situation and/or location. We do encourage that children that are home alone have access to either a landline phone or a cell phone for stability. Wifi is not as reliable as a form of communication as it will not work if there is a power outage or wifi server disruption. Pros for landlines are that 911 services can automatically see the address of the location the call for help was made from which speeds up response, if using a wired phone (cord runs to the handset as well as connects to the wall) it will still dial out if there is a power outage.) Pros for Cell phones: Portable, can preset call numbers for kids, as long as battery is charged will work during a power outage. (Cell phones don't provide exact location to 911 services but communicate a general area like the neighbourhood the call came from) The option for your family will depend on a variety of factors but you should take time to consider the best way for the children to be able to call for help or support when needed.

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. The onus is on the parents to determine and prove that the child possesses the ability, knowledge, skills, maturity and sense of responsibility to handle **short periods of time** alone. When considering leaving a child unsupervised, age and maturity are important factors in assessing whether care and supervision is adequate. As a parent, you must judge whether your child is ready to spend time unsupervised. 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:

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- 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 and other care workers 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.