

# Home Alone: Are You and Your Child Ready?

Handout

Presented By:  
Kelly Collins, MA



Sponsored by NIH Child Care Board & ORS/Division of Amenities and  
Transportation Services



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### Objectives

- Discuss minimum age requirements for leaving children home alone
- Assess parental readiness for leaving children
- Understand your child's development and readiness to be left alone
- Establish a "Home Alone" contract
- "Home Alone" considerations for success
- Discuss resources for parents and children

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### Minimum Age Requirements for "Home Alone"

- Check with your local county or government to see the requirements in your area
- For example:  
**Montgomery County Department of Health & Human Services**
  - Parents who leave a child alone under the age of 8 may be investigated for neglect.
  - Parents who leave any child alone for long periods of time, may be investigated for neglect.
  - Parents who leave any child alone who is not capable of handling the responsibilities, or becomes frightened of the situation, may be investigated for neglect.
  - A babysitter must be at least 13 years old to care for children under the age of 8.

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**Definition of an “Unattended Child”**

Maryland Statewide Child Protective Services Screening Procedures (SSA 95-13) defines An “Unattended Child” as:

- a child (who) has been abandoned.
- a child under eight (8) left alone or left in the care of a person who is not reliable or under age thirteen (13).
- a child aged eight (8) through twelve (12) left alone for longer than brief periods without support systems which should include phone numbers for parents', other family members, or neighbors, information about personal safety, and what to do in an emergency. Children in this age group may not be left to care for children under the age of eight (8).

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**Cont.**

- a child twelve (12) or over who is left alone:
- for long hours or overnight or with responsibilities beyond his or her capacities; or
- where there is some special risk factor such as mental retardation or physical handicap that would indicate that the child may be in jeopardy.
- a child of any age who is handicapped and left alone, if the handicapping condition constitutes as special risk factor which indicates that the child is in jeopardy.

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**Questions to ask yourself**

Does my child have the capabilities to handle difficult situations and make decisions on his/her own?

For example:

- What to do if a delivery man knocks on the door
- What to do if they forgot their key
- What if a friend comes over unannounced?

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**Questions to ask yourself**

If my child handles this decision on their own successfully will he/she come away feeling better about themselves or learn something important?

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**Questions to ask yourself**

If my child makes a mistake, will the consequences be something that he/she and I can live with in the short term and long term?

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**Praise and Encouragement**

- Praise the specific accomplishment
- Comment on the action not how you feel
- Take notice of the effort your child put into the accomplishment
- Role play and offer feedback
- Take baby steps – try leaving your child for shorter periods first so they build their confidence

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### Assess readiness

- You must carefully consider your child's readiness and assess your child's ability to consistently perform important tasks.
- Self-care situations may be appropriate for older children who:
  - are able to assume responsibility for themselves,
  - have cared for themselves on other occasions,
  - know first aid and personal safety skills,
  - demonstrate maturity and problem-solving skills, and
  - use good judgment and talk to you about problems.

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### Assess Readiness:

- Your child must be able to:
  - follow safety instructions and responsibilities according to your directions,
  - lock and unlock doors and windows,
  - answer telephone calls and write messages,
  - prepare a snack and get a drink for themselves,
  - handle minor problems that arise, but know when to ask for help from an adult.

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### Sibling Relationships

- If you have more than one child, consider how well they get along together.
- Develop the "home alone" rules with your child's input.
- Establish authority
- Create incentives

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## Home Alone Rules/Contract

- Consider asking your child to sign a “home alone” contract to add impact.
- Sample contract provided in handout packet
- Re-evaluate consistently
  - Written
  - Specific
  - Consequences

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## Practice 911 Calls

- Key Information:
  - Where are you calling from? (Where do you live?)
  - What type of emergency is this?
  - Who needs help?
  - Is the person awake and breathing?
- Stay calm, speak slowly and clearly

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## Internet Safety

- Become computer literate
- Keep the computer in a common area
- Share an email account with younger children
- Bookmark your child's favorite sites. Your child will have easy access and be less likely to make a typo that could lead to inappropriate content.
- Spend time online together
- Monitor kids use of chat rooms
- Find out about online protection elsewhere
- Check out the following weblink to a previous lunch & learn on cyber safety for more information:  
[http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare/parent\\_seminars.htm](http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare/parent_seminars.htm)

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### **Important Phone Numbers**

- 911
  - Police
  - Electric Company
  - Fire
- Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222
- Gas Company
- Other Adult Contacts
- Adult with Spare Key
- Child's Friends
- Mom and Dad contact information
  - Work and Cell Phone Number

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### **Children's Entertainment**

- Discuss what the children will be doing while you are away
- Make sure TV and Internet safety monitors are in place
- List acceptable activities and prohibited activities
- Discuss friends and their role in your child's life

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### **Children Coming Home to an Empty House**

- Know child's route home
- Discuss procedures for checking in
- Identify accessible neighbors
- Discuss sign of danger or concern they should be watching out for

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**NIH Child and Dependent Care  
Resource & Referral Service**

- NIH Employees, trainees and contractors have free, unlimited access to a Work/life Specialist, who can help you to assess your caregiving role and support you by providing a range of resources and referrals.

**1-800-777-1720**

- This program is sponsored by the NIH Office of Research Services, Division of Amenities and Transportation Services.

For more information visit:  
<http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare>

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**Thank You**

- Please take a moment to complete the evaluation form provided, your input is appreciated.

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## SELF-CARE READINESS CHECKLIST

The checklist is provided as a tool to help parents consider the appropriateness of self-care for their children. It should be used as a guide only, NOT as the deciding factor. Parent and child should complete the checklist independently. Are there differences in how the situation is viewed? Discuss the differences. Use this tool as one factor in making your decision.

Yes or No - The child can give his or her address and directions to home.

Yes or No - The child can repeat and dial the home phone number.

Yes or No - The child can explain how to handle first aid for cuts and scrapes, burns, nosebleeds, poisonings, bites, choking, and eye injuries.

Yes or No - The child knows where to locate first aid supplies kept in the home.

Yes or No - The child can identify two escape routes from the home in case of fire.

Yes or No - The child can handle telephone calls correctly.

Yes or No - The child has demonstrated correct procedures for handling strangers at the door.

Yes or No - The child knows how to reach parents or other responsible adults by phone.

Yes or No - The child can name two adults to contact in case of an emergency.

Yes or No - The child will tell parents or child care providers about daily events without prompting.

Yes or No - The child can locate a safe place to seek shelter during a storm.

Yes or No - The child can name five household rules and identify which ones were followed the previous week.

Yes or No - The child can give an example of a time when they had to figure out and decide what was the right thing to do, without adult input.

Yes or No - The child feels safe when alone and fears (such as darkness) or nightmares are minimal when adults are not around.

Yes or No - The child has indicated an interest or willingness to stay on his or her own.

Yes or No - If other children will be present, the children are willing to stay alone with each other and fighting is at a tolerable level.

Respond (hardly ever, sometimes, often, most of the time, or always) to the following statements describing the child.

The child...

completes household chores

completes homework

arrives at school on time

arrives home on time

lets parent/provider know where he or she is going before leaving

ask for help when problems arise

If you answered "no" or "less than often" to any question, it may signal a need for information, training in self-care skills, or an alternative care situation if a parent or child care provider is to be away. Certain combinations of "no" and "sometimes" may indicate minor problems and can be easily corrected. Other combinations of "no" and "hardly ever" may suggest the child is not yet ready to stay alone. For instance, a mature child who cannot reach an adult by phone, but who lives in a relatively safe neighborhood with an easily reached emergency contact person is at less risk than a child who will not complete tasks, fights often with siblings, and will not talk about concerns. If you answered "yes" or at least "most of the time" to all the questions, the child may be ready to be home alone. But even if the child is ready, self-care may not be wise. For example, the amount of time the child is alone may be too long, or your neighborhood may be unsafe.

Source: National Network for Child Care, NNCC.org

Other Topics of Discuss/Consider:

\_\_\_ Who to call in case of an emergency

\_\_\_ Who to call in case of a non-emergency

\_\_\_ Chores and other expectations to be completed

\_\_\_ Allotted television time

\_\_\_ Allotted phone time

\_\_\_ Allotted video game time

\_\_\_ Routine to be followed

\_\_\_ Rules for people being allowed to come over

\_\_\_ Rules for going outside of the house

\_\_\_ How to leave a phone message

\_\_\_ How to ignore someone at the door

\_\_\_ The consequences for not following through with your expectations

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# ***Contract***

## Staying Home Alone While Parents Are Away

I know that being able to stay home alone while my parents are away is a privilege. I respect that my parents love me and want to keep me safe. My parents respect that I am getting older and want the privilege of being able to take care of myself. With that in mind, we agree:

- I will strictly follow the rules set by my parents for the time that I am home alone.
- I understand the routine my parents and I have developed and will follow through with it.
- I understand what to do in case of an emergency.
- I understand what to do if someone comes to our door.
- I understand what to do if the phone rings.
- I know who to call if I need help for minor things and for major things.
- I know how to contact my parents if I need to.
- I will not have a party while my parents are away.
- I will not use illegal substances while my parents are away.
- I will be where my parents expect me to be, with whom I am expected to be with, the entire time my parents are away.

The consequences for not following through with these expectations and limits are:

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Signatures

\_\_\_\_\_ (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Parent)

# Important Phone Numbers

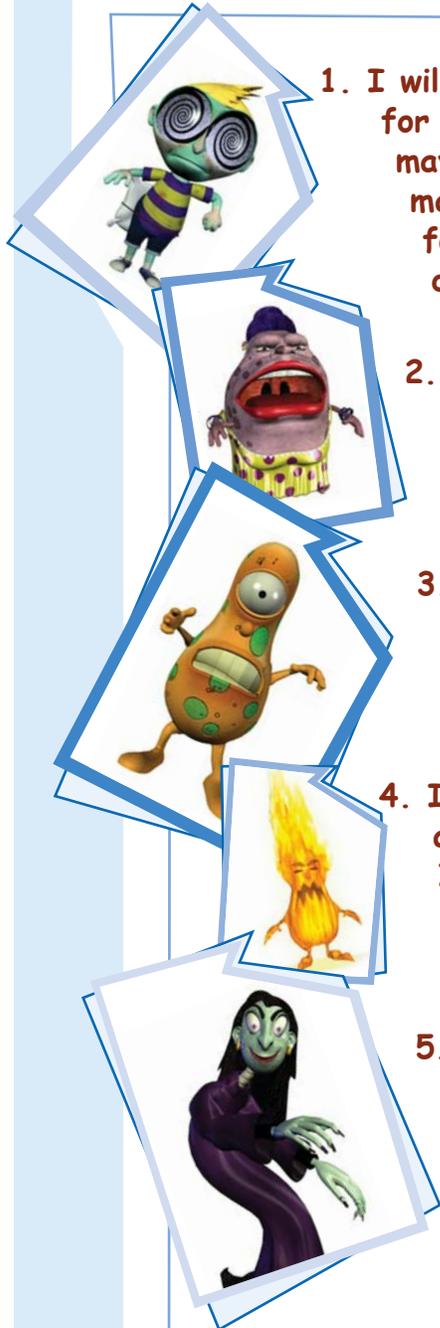
Mom	Dad
Full Name	Full Name
Where Mom Works	Where Dad Works
Phone at Work	Phone at Work
Cell Phone	Cell Phone
Neighbor	Neighbor
Name	Name
Phone Number	Phone Number
Relative	Relative
Name	Name
Phone Number	Phone Number
Doctor	Emergency
Name	In any emergency dial <b>911</b>
Phone Number	
Ambulance	Police
<b>911</b> Local Phone Number	<b>911</b> Local Phone Number
Fire Department	Poison Control
<b>911</b> Local Phone Number	<b>911</b> Local Phone Number
Other	Other
Local Phone Number	Local Phone Number
Other	Other
Local Phone Number	Local Phone Number

# Home First Aid Kits: What should they include?



- Roll of non- allergic adhesive tape
- Assorted Size Band-Aids
- Blunt-tip Scissors
- Cotton Swabs
- Flashlight
- Sterile Gauze Pads & Roll
- Disposable Latex Gloves
- Triangular Bandage, Scarf, Sling
- Oral Digital Thermometer
- Disposal Washcloths
- Calamine Lotion/Vaseline
- Tweezers
- Ice Bag or Chemical Ice Pack
- Safety Pins
- Antiseptic Cream
- Antibacterial Liquid Soap
- Alcohol or Witch Hazel

# INTERNET SAFETY PLEDGE FOR GRADES 3-6



1. I will talk with my parents or guardian so that we can set up rules for going online. The rules will include the time of day that I may be online, the length of time I may be online, whom I may communicate with while online, and appropriate areas for me to visit while online. I will not break these rules or access other areas without their permission.
2. I will tell a trusted adult if I come across anything that makes me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. I will not download anything from anyone without permission from my parents or guardian.
3. I will never share personal information such as my address, my telephone number, my parents' or guardian's work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' or guardian's permission.
4. I will never respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. If I do get a message like that, I will tell a trusted adult right away so that he or she can contact the online service. And I will not send those kinds of messages.
5. I will never meet in person with anyone I have first "met" online without checking with my parents or guardian. If my parents or guardian agrees to the meeting, it will be in a public place and my parents or guardian must come along.

© Signed \_\_\_\_\_



© Signed \_\_\_\_\_



# INTERNET SAFETY PLEDGE

*for Middle & High School*

## **I WILL TALK WITH MY PARENTS OR GUARDIAN ABOUT THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND GROUND RULES FOR GOING ONLINE**

I will talk with my parents or guardian so that we can set up rules for going online. The rules will include the time of day that I may be online, the length of time I may be online, whom I may communicate with while online, and appropriate areas for me to visit while online. I will not break these rules or access other areas without their permission.

I will never download anything from anyone I don't know. In addition to offensive content, spam or junk E-mail may contain viruses that can damage my computer.

## **I WILL KEEP MY IDENTITY PRIVATE**

I will never share personal information such as my full name, my mailing address, my telephone number, the name of my school, or any other information that could help someone determine my actual identity. I will also not reveal any personal information about my friends or family.

I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents or guardian.

## **I WILL NEVER RESPOND TO ANY ONLINE COMMUNICATION THAT MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE**

I will tell a trusted adult if I come across anything that makes me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

I will never respond to any messages that are rude or offensive in any way. I will show the message to a trusted adult right away so that he or she can decide if it's necessary to contact the online service or other authorities.

## **I WILL NEVER MEET IN PERSON WITH ANYONE I HAVE FIRST "MET" ONLINE WITHOUT DISCUSSING IT WITH MY PARENTS OR GUARDIAN**

Since the biggest danger to my safety is getting together with someone I have first "met" online, I won't meet in person with anyone unless my parents or guardian agrees to the meeting, they will go with me to the meeting, and the meeting will be in a public place.

## **I WILL RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS WHILE ONLINE**

The Internet is a large community; therefore, my behavior while on it affects others. I will always treat others the way I would like to be treated.

I will respect copyright laws and check on sources. When writing reports I will make sure that the online sources of information are credible, and I will always cite my sources.

Piracy is illegal and keeps authors, artists, and others from getting paid for their work. I will never download things such as pictures, games, music, or movies that have not been given to the public for free.

SIGNED

SIGNED

# Home Alone Safety Tips

According to the Home Safety Council, home related injuries result in nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits on average each year. Kids who are going to be spending time at home without adult supervision need a safety plan.

You should check with your state about the laws governing when a child is old enough to be left home alone. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends adult supervision for children until about the age of 11 or 12. In our current economic reality, families may not be able to afford all of the usual camps and activities this summer. When self-care is the only option for all or part of the summer, maturity and comfort level are key factors in whether a child should be left alone.

Call a family meeting to discuss a plan for a safe and productive summer. Consider the following safety tips in creating your plan:

- **Post a list of contact numbers** including family members, trusted friends, neighbors, and emergency personnel. Provide your child with your cell phone and/or work number. Assure them that you will check messages often and return their call promptly.
- **Make sure your child knows his/her phone number and address.** It is very easy for anyone to panic in an emergency. Write the home information on the contact list so your child can easily read it aloud to a 911 operator.
- **Brainstorm about fun, safe activities.** Some contact games and sibling “rough-housing” put kids at higher risk for injury. Your kids might enjoy working together to create a play for the family during Fourth of July weekend. Encourage other safe activities, such as reading and word puzzles. The Internet is not always safe for kids to use unsupervised; remind them that the regular house rules about the computer apply.
- **Enlist your kids help in special projects** such as writing a grocery list for a new recipe from a magazine, planning a reunion, or organizing family photos.
- **Prepare snacks ahead of time** so your child is not tempted to use the stove or microwave without supervision.
- **Make sure that a first aid kit is accessible** to perform simple first aid. Teach basic first aid in advance. Show your child where there is a flashlight and batteries in case of a power outage.
- **Make sure there are working smoke detectors.** Practice fire evacuation routes.
- **Teach your children to survey the scene.** If coming home to an empty house, instruct them to never enter the house if there are open or broken windows or doors, or other signs of forced entry. Leave and get help from a trusted neighbor.
- **Practice door and phone safety.** Keep all doors and windows locked. Remind your child never to open the door to strangers. Never tell someone at the door or on the phone that you are home alone. Use the Caller ID or an answering machine to screen calls.
- **Plan an occasional “field trip” or outdoor activity to socialize with other kids.** Take turns with other parents to provide supervision. Kids should not invite friends to the house.
- **Call and check on your child.** Always let them know if you are running late.

Sources: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, LifeWork Strategies Inc., and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.



Do you need help finding quality child care?

**1-800-777-1720**

**NIH employees and contractors have  
free unlimited access to the  
NIH Child Care Resource & Referral Service.**

**A Work/Life Specialist can help you to assess your  
family's needs and find resources on a range of topics,  
such as:**

- Evaluating care options
- Finding licensed providers
- Child Care Centers
- Family Child Care Homes
- Nanny care
- Pre-schools & Nursery
- Before & after school care
- Back-up care
- Summer camp
- Adoption resources
- Special needs resources
- College planning

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**Division of Amenities and Transportation Services**

For more information, visit:  
<http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare>



# Home Alone Resources

## On the Web:

### **PBS Kids Go!**

[http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/games/in\\_charge\\_flash.html](http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/games/in_charge_flash.html)

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/itsmylife/resources/homealone.html>

### **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Administration for Children & Families**

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/homealone.cfm>

### **National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center**

<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/families.pdf>

### **A Better Child – A Safer Child**

<http://a-better-child.tripod.com/id10.html>

### **National Network for Child Care**

<http://www.nncc.org/>

### **Prevent Child Abuse America**

[www.preventchildabuse.org/publications/parents/downloads/home\\_alone.pdf](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/publications/parents/downloads/home_alone.pdf)

### **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Home Alone Children**

<http://www.aacap.org/>

### **USDA – Nutrition**

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

<http://www.mypyramid.gov>

### **NIH Office of Research Services-Division of Amenities and Transportation Services**

<http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare>

[http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare/parent\\_seminars.htm](http://does.ors.od.nih.gov/childcare/parent_seminars.htm) (archives of previous Lunch & Learns)

## Books:

### **Home-Along Kids: The Working Parent's Complete Guide to Providing the Best Care for Your Child**

by Bryan E. Robinson, Bobbie H. Rowland, Mick Coleman

### **Street Smarts for Kids: What Parents Must Know to Keep Their Children Safe**

by Detective Ric Bentz and Christine Allison

## Courses:

**Home Alone-** This class will prepare 8- to 11-year-olds and their parents for times when children will spend brief periods alone at home. Children must attend with a parent or guardian. Cost is \$10 per child. Call 1-800-542-5096 to for information on course dates and registration information.

## **Kelly Collins, MA**

Manager of Special Projects

LifeWork Strategies, Inc

An affiliate of Adventist HealthCare, Inc

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Kelly Collins holds a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Marymount University and B.S. degree in Business from Virginia Tech. For over 15 years, Kelly has worked with both public and private sector organizations to educate, counsel, and support employees and their families regarding personal and professional development issues. She has worked in several Department of Defense facilities in addition to working for several years at Potomac Ridge Psychiatric Hospital.

For the past ten years, Kelly has worked with corporate employee assistance programs to meet the work/family and mental health needs of employees and their families. Her responsibilities have included program development, training, and project management.

Kelly delivers seminars on a range of topics from stress management to personal development to effective communication. She draws from her professional education and training, and her personal experience as a mother of two and a resident of Montgomery County, MD.

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