

Lacking Supervision

Parents don't want to leave young children home without adult supervision, but for many family situations there is no choice.

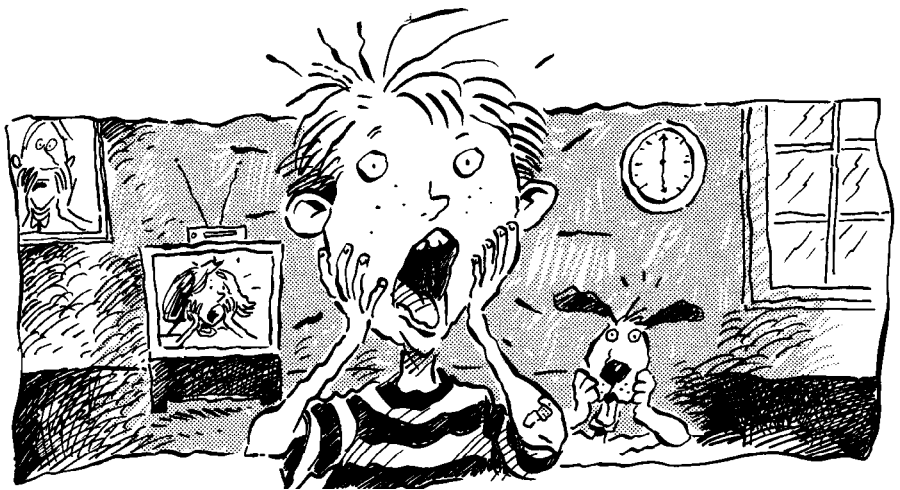
According to the U.S. Census, one-third of all school-age children in the U.S. are, for some part of the week, latchkey kids. Over four million children are injured at home each year.

First Steps

Before you leave your child alone, check with your local child protection service on the legal age a child can be unsupervised. Contact your school district or the "Y" for possible latchkey programs.

To minimize the trauma to the child and parent:

- Send your child to a self-care or babysitting course.
- Engage in "role-playing" activities. Act out the situation and coach the child on proper behavior. Possible situations include: a fire emergency, a stranger at the door, a scary telephone call, a sibling who does not return from school, and an injury.
- Begin by leaving the child alone for a short time.
- Consider buying an easygoing dog for security and companionship.
- Develop and post clear house rules, from cooking to play to having guests. Buy snacks that do not have to be heated. Teach kids what appliances are off limits.
- Make the house look occupied. Turn on the lights and radio or TV.
- Decide whether you want your child to simply not answer the door, or say through a closed door, "My mom is busy. Can I take a message?" The same applies to phone calls.
- Be sure children can operate window and door locks and the alarm system, and that they use them when they are home alone.
- Sit down as a family to discuss fire escape routes from each room.
- Keep guns, ammunition, prescriptions, liquor, matches, lighters and cigarettes locked up.



- Point out potential hazards in the home and teach children how to avoid injuries from them.
- Make sure kids know where the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are located and what to do if one sounds. Also, review procedures for power failures and overflowing toilets.
- Create a survival kit for a weather emergency or black-out. Include a flashlight, portable radio, extra batteries, bandages, jug of water, and games to pass time.
- Show kids where the first aid kit is, and how to use the contents.
- Tell the child where you will be, how you can be reached, and when you will return home.
- Occasionally go home early and unannounced to be sure rules are being followed.

The Telephone Connection

- Help children memorize important information, such as:
 - Their full name, complete address and telephone number.
 - Their parents' full names.
 - The nearest intersection to their home, to help direct police and fire officials.
 - How to report an emergency to 911 or the Operator.
- Post a list of important telephone numbers next to each phone, including parents' workplace; police and fire departments; poison control center; and neighbors or relatives.

- Purchase Internet filter and blocker programs. Tell children never to divulge personal data.
- When in doubt about whether to call 911, always place the call.
- Consider carrying a cell phone or a beeper for emergencies.

Comings And Goings

- Take a "safety walk" through the neighborhood. Point out the safest route to and from school or other activities. Caution children against taking shortcuts. Tell them:
 - Do not go into an empty home if they think they are being followed.
 - Do not enter the home if there is anything unusual. Go to a friendly neighbor's home.
 - Make a scene when threatened. Yell "fire" instead of "help."
 - Do not wear their house key where it can be seen by others. Place the key on a chain around their neck, or pin it inside a pocket.
 - Never talk to a stranger, particularly one who starts a conversation. Define "stranger" so children are not confused.
 - Never accept rides or gifts from anyone unless they have a parent's permission.
 - Check in with a parent as soon as they get home. ■