

Lesson 3: Home Alone and Telephone Safety

Parent/Guardian Instructions:

- Review the home alone and telephone safety materials with your child (ren).

Lesson Discussion:

About 3,500,000 American children between ages five and 12 spend some time home alone after school. However, the average amount of time isn't much--about an hour a day, according to a University of Michigan Study by Sandra L. Hofferth, a sociologist at the university's Institute for Social Research, and research associate Zita Jankuniene analyzed data from time diaries that detailed 1,500 youngsters' activities and then interviewed their parents to discover what the lives of U.S. children are like from the time they get out of school until the time they go to bed.

They found that 73% go straight home from school, while 11% go to child care, either in someone else's home or in a formal child care center. Another eight percent stay at school. That leaves about eight percent who go somewhere else, including the mall, indoor or outdoor recreation facilities, or their parents' workplaces.

The 19% who are supervised either in child care or at school is much lower than the two-thirds of school age kids in the study whose mothers are employed. Many parents have been able to arrange their schedules so that at least one is home at the end of the school day, either by working part time or by adjusting work hours, according to the researchers.

Still, a sizeable proportion of kids spend time alone. Overall, Hofferth and Jankuniene discovered that 26% spend some time after school completely alone, including time spent getting from one place to another on their own; 14% spend time alone at home; and 2.5% spend time alone elsewhere. The average amount of time spent at home unsupervised by adults is one hour, varying with age from 47 minutes for children five to seven to one hour and 15 minutes for those ages 11 and 12.

Parent/Guardian and Child (ren) Activity:

- Teach your child (ren) what to do if they are home alone by keeping the doors and windows locked, don't open them to anyone they don't know and trust.
 - Speak through a closed door or peephole.
 - Never tell anyone you are home alone.
 - Immediately call your parent/guardian or a neighbor if you are afraid.
 - Keep emergency telephone numbers by the phone.
 - If the person doesn't leave call 9-1-1.
 - Don't hang up until you are told to do so; listen for instructions.
- Teach your child (ren) what they should do if the telephone rings:
 - Talk to your child (ren) about how and when you should answer the telephone.
 - If you are allowed to answer the phone, say "hello" but never give your name.
 - Never give out information about your family, never tell the caller you are home alone.
 - If you get a prank call, don't say anything, just hang up.
 - If you are afraid, call your parent/guardians or a trusted adult.
- Have your child (ren) complete the Home Alone Safety Activity Sheet.