

NEWS ARTICLE

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KEEPING KIDS SAFE AT HOME AFTER SCHOOL

Think raising kids is hard? Try leaving them alone in your house – completely unsupervised – for a few hours. Terror knows no bounds.

With the start of school, your children may be staying by themselves for a few minutes or a couple of hours before you get home from work. Don't worry! This is a common practice for lots of parents. And there are millions of homes still standing and safe, happy children inside when Mom and Dad do arrive. You can tame the fear and turn what could be a stressful situation into a positive experience for both you and your children.

Start by preparing your kids and mapping out your expectations of how they should handle their time alone. Sit down together and discuss the rules. While rules can be flexible and should meet your situation, here are some to consider.

- Rule #1 – Have your child call when they get home. In today's world of cell phones, this should be easy to do. It puts you at ease knowing they are home and reinforces that you are still available to them even if you are away.
- Rule #2 – Set up rules that both of you can live with. Expecting them to come home and start working on homework may not be realistic. Some kids prefer to tackle homework as soon as possible. Others want to relax for a few minutes and then start working on it.

Decide what works best.

- Rule #3 – Can they have a snack? Most children come home hungry and want a snack to tie them over until supper. Have plenty of easy to make nutritious snacks available for

them to prepare. Make sure they know how to work the stove and microwave and have some basic cooking skills. Older children can handle most food preparation.

- Rule #4 – What about TV or video games? You may need to set boundaries. Again, it depends on when homework needs to be done.
- Rule #5 – Can they go outside? Some kids have animals to feed and chores to be done before it gets dark. Being outside can help them relax and blow off some of their restless energy and keep them occupied.
- Rule #6 – Minimize situations your kids may not be able to handle. This could include no visitors while you are away, how to answer the phone and not answering the door to strangers.

Talk to your kids about who is allowed to come in the house while you are away. This could be grandparents, an aunt or uncle, or a trusted neighbor. Otherwise, explain that they should not answer the door to anyone else.

Emergencies could happen. Teach them how and when to call 911. Of course, stress to them they should also call you in the event of an emergency.

Kids who learn to entertain themselves are more creative and capable of problem solving. Another plus, being at home by themselves can build independence and bolster self-esteem.

It goes without saying, consider the age of the child. Kindergarten children do not need to be left alone at home. However, most eleven-year-olds and older can handle the added responsibility. As a parent, you know your child and what they are capable of.

Finally, there are some great after school programs to get involved with. 4-H is the youth development program of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. There are several 4-H Clubs and activities that meet after school. 4-H programs are educational, build

leadership skills and provide opportunities for youth to give back to their community through service projects. Call the Howard County Extension Service if you are interested in learning more about 4-H. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs to all eligible persons without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

Recipe of the Week

Try these recipes for great after school snacks. They are easy-to-make and are nutritious. Make the granola bars on the weekend and enjoy as an after-school snack or a quick breakfast.

Fruit Roll-Up

1 whole grain tortilla

1 ½ Tablespoons peanut butter

½ to 1 cup sliced fruit (any kind-apples, bananas, pears, grapes, etc.)

Wash hands. Spread peanut butter on one side of tortilla. Place sliced fruit on top of peanut butter. Roll up the tortilla tightly to keep the fruit inside. Slice in half and serve. Yield: 2 servings

Nutrition information per serving: 200 calories, 8 g fat, 6 g protein, 27 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 280 mg sodium

Nut-Free Blueberry Granola Bars

2 cups rolled oats

¾ cup dried blueberries (or any other dried fruit)

1 Tablespoon light brown sugar

¼ cup + 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil

¼ cup honey

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Wash hands. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease an 8x8-inch square pan with cooking spray, and line with parchment paper if desired.

Combine oats, blueberries, and brown sugar in a large bowl. Add oil, honey, and vanilla extract and stir until evenly combined.

Pour mixture into pan and press with a spatula to flatten. Bake for 30-35 minutes, until lightly golden and crisp to the touch. Allow to cool completely in pan and then cut into 12 equal-sized bars. Yield: 12 bars

Nutrition information per serving: 160 calories, 7 g fat, 2 g protein, 24 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 0 mg sodium