

a healthy balance

Did you know your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) could help?

Helping parents keep their children safe and secure is just one of the ways your EAP can help its members. For more information, call your confidential EAP any day, any time, for free assistance, resources or a referral to help resolve your concerns.

Guidelines for parents of latchkey children

Many parents feel confident that their children are capable of caring for themselves. If you have "latchkey children" who are home after school without adult supervision, there are ways to ensure that they stay safe and happy.

Are your children mature enough?

Child care experts debate the effects of letting children care for themselves. Some research shows that latchkey children develop independence, resourcefulness and a sense of responsibility. Other research indicates that children left on their own for extended periods of time may become lonely and even depressed.

Most parents don't feel comfortable leaving children younger than 10 on their own for several hours. In addition, children younger than 13 may have a hard time supervising a younger sibling, so when more than one child is involved, you may need to consider other options.

Above all, listen carefully to your children's concerns. Take time to help them adjust, but also be ready to consider other after-school care options if they are extremely uncomfortable with the arrangement.

Prepare your children

If you and your children decide that a latchkey arrangement will work, set some ground rules that will help them look after themselves.

- Arrange a time for your children to check in with you by phone after they return home.
- With your children's input, make a simple schedule for homework, chores and play time while they are alone.

- Teach your children how to prepare snacks and clean up after themselves – and decide which kitchen appliances (i.e., the stoves and/or oven) are off limits.
- Keep emergency phone numbers by the phone, have your children memorize family phone numbers, and discuss how they will get help in the event of an emergency.
- Keep a first aid kit in an accessible location and show your children how to treat and bandage cuts and burns.
- Prepare a household emergency kit, including a working flashlight and a battery-operated transistor radio that your children can use in case of a power failure.
- Show your children how to lock doors and windows and teach them how to recognize and take precautions against anything unusual when they arrive home such as a broken window or an open door.
- Encourage problem-solving by asking your children to propose solutions to situations that may arise.

Who else can help?

While your children may feel comfortable taking care of themselves, it's always important to know that there are other adults who can help.

- Your community may have hot lines, classes and a neighborhood "safe house" program for latchkey children.
- Grandparents, other relatives may be willing to check in or look after your children.
- Hired household help, neighbors or older adults may also be able to lend a hand on occasion.

problem

solved