

FAMILY WORKSHOP HANDBOOK



At home **Alone**

5 easy steps to independence

INTRODUCTION

About The At Home Alone Program:

This program was developed by Partners in Prevention to help families prepare their 10 to 14 year olds to be home alone safely. For families with a special needs child, make sure to consider their unique needs before deciding to leave him home alone.

This program will help families:

- communicate together
- find out if they are comfortable leaving 10 to 14 year olds home alone
- develop a contract/agreement between parents and their 10 to 14 year olds
- and increase safety awareness.

The Step of ALONE

The At Home Alone program has five easy steps:

1. **A** ssess if you are ready
2. **L** earn about safety
3. **O** rganize your home
4. **N** egotiate the terms
5. **E** valuate

Table of Contents

1	Assess If You Are Ready	<u>Pages</u>
	Start By Communicating	3
	Are You Ready	4
2	Learn About Safety	
	What Do I Need To Know?	7
	Home Safety	10
3	Organize Your Home	
	The Kit	17
	The Calendar	19
4	Negotiate The Terms	
	The Contract	21
5	Evaluate How Things Are Going	22

1. Assess If You Are Ready

Start By Communicating

Open lines of communication between parents and their children is critical. Parents need to ensure that they feel confident about their child's ability to be home alone and that they can trust their child. The 10 to 14 year old also needs to feel safe and sure that there will be someone available if help is required. This takes communication. But, there is more to communicating than just talking. Both parents and the 10 to 14 year old need to:

Remember that your attitude is as important as your words.

- The most important part of communication is trust. Let your 10 to 14 year old know that you trust them. Ten to 14 year olds need to show their parents that they can be trusted.

Be honest.

- Say what you mean. Mean what you say.
- You don't have to agree with everything each other says. Say why you don't agree.

Respect each other.

- Respect feelings.
- Don't make fun of ideas.
- Ask for opinion.
- Respect privacy.

Listen.

- Take the time to really listen to what is being said.
- Let the other person know that they can talk to you and that you'll let them have their say.

Be fair.

- Always be willing to talk things over, but once you agree on a rule, it has to be followed.
- Don't change the rules without warning. But be willing to change rules when they need changing.

Hang on to your sense of humour.

- There will be times when it's the only thing that gets you through.

Are You Ready?

When are children ready to be left home alone? This must be talked over by all family members. Parents should fill in the parent questionnaire while the young person fills in the 10 to 14 year old questionnaire. Comparing answers will help families see some of the issues they need to talk about.

**Am I Ready?
(Parent Questionnaire)**

	YES	NO
1. My child knows how to contact me at work.	()	()
2. a) Arrangements have been made with a relative or neighbour for my child to contact them if needed.	()	()
b) My child knows how to contact a relative or neighbour if needed.	()	()
3. My child knows when to call 911 or the local emergency number.	()	()
4. My child knows basic first aid.	()	()
5. There is a first aid kit in our home and my child knows where to find it.	()	()
6. My child knows what to do if someone comes to the door or calls on the phone.	()	()
7. My child would know what to do if they lost their key.	()	()
8. My child knows how to make a safe healthy snack.	()	()
9. We have discussed the rules about friends visiting, watching TV, types and location of physical activity and doing homework.	()	()
10. My child is ready to be left alone at home.	()	()

**Am I Ready?
(10 to 14 Year Old Questionnaire)**

	YES	NO
1. I know how to contact my parent/guardian at work.	()	()
2. I know how to contact a relative or neighbour if I need them.	()	()
3. I know when to call 911 or the local emergency number.	()	()
4. I know basic first aid.	()	()
5. My family has a first aid kit and I know where it is kept.	()	()
6. I know what to do if someone comes to the door or calls on the phone.	()	()
7. I know what to do if I lose my key.	()	()
8. I know how to make a healthy and safe snack.	()	()
9. I have discussed the rules about friends visiting, watching TV, types and location of physical activity and doing homework.	()	()
10. I think I am ready to be home alone.	()	()

2. Learn About Safety

What You Need To Know

The 10 to 14 year old who is home alone may be faced with the need to make decisions about many things.

For example:

- What should I do when I get home?
- What should I do if I lose my key?
- What should I do if the power goes out?
- What should I do if I am not feeling well?
- Who can I call if I need help?

The “Am I Ready” questionnaire (pg. 5 & 6) helped you to identify some of the things that you need to talk about. Make a list of some of the decisions that your 10 to 14 year old might have to make when home alone:

1. About home safety
2. About emergency situations
3. About the rules

The “You Are Not A.L.O.N.E.” Worksheet is a checklist that families should talk about to make sure everyone is clear on what is expected.

When you have talked about the checklist, the 10 to 14 year old should write in all the answers. This is to make sure he or she knows how to act in different situations. Emphasize that in a situation they are not too sure about, the best policy is to call a parent/guardian or the emergency support person.

“You Are Not A.L.O.N.E.” Worksheet

You need to know the answer to all of these questions:

1. I have a house key of my own that is always with me. Yes ___ No ___
2. If I forget or lose mine, I should _____.
3. If I live in an apartment building, to get inside my apartment building, I need to _____.
4. If I have to use a security system, to use my home’s security system, I need to _____.
5. If I have to stay late after school, I should _____.
6. If I miss the school bus, I should _____.
7. I know that if I need help in a hurry, I can phone _____ and she/he will help me.
8. I should only call 911 or the local emergency number if _____.
9. If I ever feel lonely and need someone to talk to I can call _____.
10. I can call my mom/dad/guardian at _____.
11. Things that I can call my mom/dad/guardian about when I am at home alone are _____.
12. Things that I shouldn’t call them about are _____
_____.
13. If I am looking after my brother or sister, I am responsible for _____
_____.
14. If I am home with an older brother or sister, my responsibilities are _____
_____.

15. If someone comes to the door when I am home alone I should _____
_____.

16. If the phone rings when I am home alone I should _____
_____.

17. The rule about having friends over when I am home alone is _____
_____.

18. a) I am allowed to eat the following snacks when I am home alone
_____.

b) I am allowed to do the following physical activities _____
_____.

c) I am allowed to be physically active in the following locations
_____.

19. I am allowed to use the following:

	Yes	No	Don't Have
Stove	()	()	()
Microwave	()	()	()
Telephone	()	()	()
T.V.	()	()	()
Computer	()	()	()

Home Safety

When planning to stay home alone, it is important to think about safety and injury prevention. Consider the possible dangers and talk about how they should be handled. This will increase families' confidence and children's safety, as will the emergency phone numbers and a well stocked first aid kit.

Physical Activities

When discussing physical activities, always choose safe and appropriate activities and locations. For suggestions on activities, call your local health department.

Food Preparation

Kitchens are equipped with many tools that make food preparation quick and easy but injuries can happen. Follow these tips to protect yourself when making safe and healthy snacks.

- ◆ If you use a microwave oven, use only microwave safe containers, lids and wraps. Do not use aluminum foil or any metal containers.
- ◆ Keep a supply of foods you are able to prepare.
- ◆ Use a knife that is the right size and blade for the food you need to cut.
- ◆ Don't pry toast from a plugged-in toaster. Pull the plug first.

Fire

Young people should learn about fire safety from an early age. If a fire happens in your home you must act quickly, but the best protection is prevention. Learn how to prevent a fire in your home. Your local Fire Department can provide you with fire safety information.

How to Play it Safe

Most people die from smoke inhalation and not from the actual fire. Aside from prevention, working smoke alarms are one of the best ways to save lives in a fire situation. Remind your parents to have smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside all sleeping areas, and in bedrooms if the doors are shut.

Change the batteries in your smoke alarms when you change your clocks in the spring and fall. Also, clean your smoke alarms with a vacuum cleaner every six months and test every month. A twice yearly smoke test, done by an adult, using a piece of string or incense is also important smoke alarm maintenance.

Fire Safety if You Live in a House

- ◆ Practice fire drills with your family regularly. Plan your escape route. Know two safe ways out of every room, for example, door and window. Climb down an escape ladder if necessary, never attempt to jump. Choose a meeting place outside the house. Get out and stay out.
- ◆ If you smell smoke or hear the alarm, get down, and crawl to the door. Feel the door with the back of your hand. If the door is hot, don't open it - use the second way out instead.
- ◆ If the door is cool, open it carefully. If there is no smoke, stay low and get out fast. Close all doors behind you. Never try to hide - you can't hide from smoke. If there is smoke and no other way out, crawl under the smoke to safety.
- ◆ Go to the meeting place outside your home, well away from the fire and smoke. Once outside, stay out. Call "911" from a neighbour's home. (If you do not live in a "911" area, call your local Fire Department).
- ◆ If your clothes catch fire, **STOP, DROP** and **ROLL**. **STOP** - because flames get bigger when you run. **DROP** to the ground and cover your face. **ROLL** on the ground to smother the flames.

Fire Safety If You Live In An Apartment Building

- ◆ If there is a fire in your apartment, tell everyone in it to leave. Close all the doors behind you and leave the door unlocked. Pull the fire alarm on your floor and yell FIRE. Leave the building using the nearest stairway. Call the fire department when you are safe.
- ◆ When you hear the fire alarm in your building, check the door to your apartment. If smoke is coming in from around the door, do not open it. If there is no smoke, open the door a little. If you see smoke and feel heat, close the door quickly.
- ◆ If the hallways are clear, take your keys, lock the door and go to the nearest stairway. **DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.** If there is smoke in that stairway, go to another stairway. Open the stairway door carefully if there is no smoke, use the stairway to leave the building.
- ◆ If you find smoke on your way down the stairs, return to your apartment. Or go to any hallway and bang on apartment doors until you find a place to take shelter. **NEVER GO TO THE ROOF.** Smoke usually rises and the roof door is usually locked.
- ◆ Wherever you are, if there is smoke, crawl underneath it. The air is cleaner near the floor. Smoke contains carbon monoxide and it will overcome you very quickly.
- ◆ If you cannot escape from the building, return to your apartment. You must protect yourself from smoke. Stay in your apartment. Use duct tape to seal the cracks around the door. Place wet towels at the bottom of the door.
- ◆ Seal vents and air ducts the same way. Call “911” and tell them where you are. Then move to the balcony, if there is one. Close the doors behind you.
- ◆ Show the rescuers where you are by hanging a sheet from the window or balcony. Keep low to the floor where the air is cleaner. Listen for instructions.

For more information about fire safety, call your local Fire Department.

Electricity

What Is It?

You use electrical energy every time you flip a switch or turn on the TV or computer. But electricity does many wonderful things, it is very powerful and can be dangerous when not used properly. Follow these tips to help protect yourself:

- ◆ If you see a wire hanging from a pole, stay away from it. Warn others to do the same, and have someone call “911” or your local emergency number.
- ◆ A green metal box or other equipment with a red hazard sign on it means there is high voltage equipment inside. It warns you that opening or poking anything into it could cause electrocution.
- ◆ Never climb a hydro pole or a tree growing near power lines. If a branch comes into contact with an electrical cable, current will travel down the tree, making it dangerous.
- ◆ Fly kites or model airplanes only in open areas, never near power lines. ◆

Don't pry toast from a plugged-in toaster. Pull the plug first.

- ◆ Water and electricity don't mix! Keep radios, hair dryers and other electrical devices away from sinks, bath tubs and swimming pools.
- ◆ Never touch anyone who is in contact with electricity, as the current can pass to you. To help, use a wooden object to move the victim away from the electrical source and call “911”.
- ◆ Keep a flash-light in a handy location in case there is a power failure.

For more information about electrical safety, call your local Hydro agency.

Natural Gas

Natural gas is one of the safest, most dependable sources of energy used today. Many common household appliances use natural gas for their fuel, including furnaces, water heaters, dryers, ranges and even gas fireplaces. You may have one or more of these appliances in your home.

As with any fuel burning appliance, a natural gas appliance has to be installed and maintained properly. Proper installation and regular maintenance by a qualified service technician combined with proper use and care by the householder, will ensure the safest and most efficient operation of the appliance. However, neglecting these could lead to problems such as: a natural gas leak or spillage of carbon monoxide gas into the house.

The following procedures describe what children should do if they suspect either one of these problems:

What to do if you suspect a gas leak?

- ◆ Natural gas has no odour. However, a harmless chemical is added to the gas to make it smell “stinky” like rotten eggs. That way, you can tell if there is a natural gas leak in your house or outside.
- ◆ If you ever think that you smell natural gas, go to a neighbour’s house right away and have them call their local fuel distributor.

What to do if you suspect a carbon monoxide problem?

- ◆ Carbon monoxide is a gas which you cannot see, smell or taste - but it is very dangerous. Breathing carbon monoxide into your body can cause: headaches, hurting eyes, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, or sickness. In very severe cases, carbon monoxide poisoning can cause: unconsciousness, brain damage or even death.
- ◆ If you or someone else in your home has any of the symptoms listed above: gather everyone together and go to a neighbour’s house right away. Have them call “911” (or if not in a 911 area, call your local emergency number).

Follow these procedures even if you have a carbon monoxide detector that hasn’t yet alarmed. It is possible that the detector may not be detecting the problem properly.

Streetproofing

10 to 14 year olds should know:

- ◆ Their name, age, telephone numbers, address, city and province.
- ◆ How to call “911” or their local emergency number in the event of an emergency.
- ◆ To tell their parents and guardians where they are at all times.
- ◆ Never to admit they’re home alone when answering the phone.
- ◆ How to answer the door if they are home alone.
- ◆ Never to invite unexpected guests in when home alone.
- ◆ Never approach or enter a stranger’s car when walking on their own.
- ◆ If they are being followed, to run home or go to the nearest public place and yell for help.
- ◆ To report to their parents or guardians, school authorities or a police officer, anyone who acts suspiciously towards them.
- ◆ To carry enough money or phone card to make a phone call.
- ◆ They should trust their feelings and say NO to an adult, especially if that adult wants them to do something wrong.
- ◆ Their parents and guardians are sensitive to their fears and that those fears can be talked about.

For more information about street safety, call your local Police Department.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

(Please complete and keep in a handy place.)

Emergency:

911

Home Address:

Home Phone Number:

Support Person:

Work:

Poison Control:

Hospital:

Doctor:

Taxi:

Other:

3. Organize Your Home

The Kit

Having the materials needed to respond to “home alone” situations can go a long way to helping the 10 to 14 year old feel confident about his or her ability to handle things. Put together a “kit” of items ahead of time.

Essential items include:

- () Key chain to clip house key (for a young person to carry out of sight).
- () Small change purse with several quarters or a Bell Card for the pay phone and a few dollars at home for an emergency.
- () Flashlight and extra batteries.
- () List of emergency phone numbers.
- () This handbook and a pen.
- () A first aid kit.
- () Extra house key.
- () Other _____

Non-essential but useful items:

- () Microwave oven.
- () “Call Display” on phone.
- () Answering machine or “call answer”.
- () Cell phone or pager.
- () Other _____

Healthy Snacking

In order to avoid conflicts when it comes to after school snacks, it is important to agree on a few nutritious snack options.

- ◆ Snacks should not take longer to make than to eat (except, of course baked goods that can be made ahead in batches and stored).
- ◆ Stock up on basic ingredients that can be easily combined to make a satisfying and nutritious snack.
- ◆ Be sure to include instructions on how to properly handle food, safety in the kitchen, and cleaning up when discussing snack preparation.

The Calendar

Writing things down helps us to remember them. The use of a calendar may help you to organize your thoughts and your time. Important information can change from day to day. By taking five minutes every evening to complete the calendar, families get a chance to communicate and update each other on their daily events.

BEFORE WRITING ON THIS CALENDAR, MAKE A FEW COPIES SO YOU CAN USE A DIFFERENT ONE EVERY WEEK.

4. Negotiate The Terms

An important part of staying safe when home alone is that both the adults and the 10 to 14 year old are clear on what is expected and that families have support systems in place. A contract can help ALL family members (parents and the 10 to 14 year old) to feel more confident about the plan that has been put into place. A neighbour or relative should witness the contract. The witness then becomes the emergency support person if the parent is unavailable and assistance is needed.

IT IS CRITICAL THAT THE PERSON IS AWARE THAT HE OR SHE IS YOUR EMERGENCY SUPPORT PERSON.

**You Are Not
ALONE
Contract**

I/We, _____ parent(s) of _____ recognize that
(Parent's name) (10 - 14 Year Old's name)

it is my/our responsibility to provide him or her with:

- a) The phone number(s) where we can be reached throughout the day.
- b) The name and phone number of a relative or neighbour who is willing to make a commitment to assist our family if we need support.
- c) Daily list of instructions or chores.

I, _____ son/daughter of _____ recognize that
(10 to 14 Year Old's Name) (Parent's name)

it is my responsibility to:

- a) Call _____ when I arrive home.
- b) Follow the daily list of instructions or chores.
- c) Ask questions if I am not sure of what to do in a particular situation.

Signature of parent(s)

Date

Signature of 10 - 14 Year Old

Date

Signature of Witness
(Emergency support person)

Date

5. Evaluate How Things Are Going

Now that you have completed the first four steps of At Home Alone and everything is in place, you need to evaluate how things are going. This is not a one time activity. Your family should have regular talks about it. Set up a regular time to review the contract. The contract can be revised as your family's needs change.

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For more information, please contact:

Halton Region

Tel: 905-825-6000

Toll Free: 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866)

TTY: 905-827-9833

Fax: 905-849-6740

www.halton.ca

