

Lacking Supervision

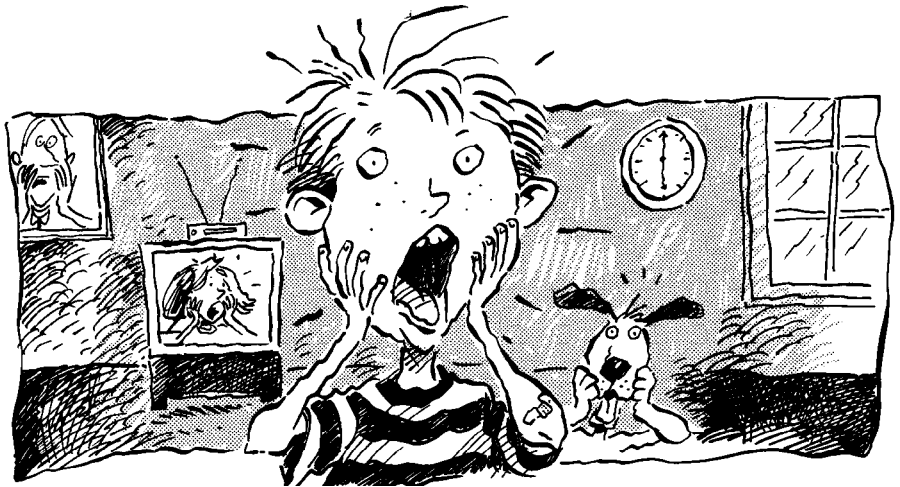
Parents don't want to leave teens home without adult supervision, but for many family situations there is no choice. **According to the U.S. Census, one-third of all school-age children in the U.S. are, for some part of the week, latchkey kids. Over four million children are injured at home each year.**

First Steps

Contact your school district or the "Y" for possible supervised programs.

To minimize the trauma to the teen and parent:

- Engage in "role-playing" activities. Act out the situation and coach your teen 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.
- 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. Tell teens what appliances are off limits.
- Make the house look occupied. Turn on the lights and radio or TV.
- Decide whether you want your teen 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 your teen 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 your teen how to avoid injuries from them.



- Make sure teens 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 your teen where the first aid kit is, and how to use the contents.
- Tell the teen 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 your teen memorize important information, such as:
 - 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 teens 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 your teen 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. ■