

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Assurance Security
208.755.4355 or 800.761.5911

Latch Key Kids

MORE COMMONLY THAN not, children are going home to an empty house without the supervision of a parent or other adult. Marian Wright Edelman, director of the Children's Defense Fund, thinks that 16 million children in the United States are latch key kids. The term *latch key kids* was coined to describe the children who could be identified by the key hanging

Home Alone

The realities facing children who find themselves home alone are very different. There are many issues, potential risks, and dangers parents should consider before a child is placed in this situation. Parents should consider the following:

- Age readiness
- Definition of parental "rules and expectations"
- How to access parents or other adults (e.g. phone numbers)
- Potentially unsafe situations (e.g. medical emergencies, fire, alcohol, drugs, strangers, guns etc.)
- When and how to answer the phone and or doorbell
- Friends and visitors coming to the house
- Responsibilities for siblings
- Pay attention to the child's feelings
- Use of unstructured time (e.g. watching TV, videos, etc.)
- Access to adult cable TV, internet chat rooms, and adult web sites



More children are coming home to an empty house while their parents are at work.

from a string around their neck. The present day term for this is self-care. The Census Bureau found that 15% of children were home alone before school, 76% after school, and 9% have parents who work night shifts. Half of all children in the country age twelve to fourteen are home alone an average of seven hours a week. In spite of the hours spent on the job, even working moms spend an average of five-and-a-half hours a day with their children.

It is not possible to make a general statement about when a child can be left alone. Many states have laws which hold parents responsible for the supervision of their children. Older adolescents are usually responsible enough to manage alone for limited periods of time. Parents must consider the child's level of maturity, past

evidence of responsible behavior, and good judgment. When a child is ready to be left alone, a graduated approach should be used starting with a very short period of time such as one hour.

Parents should talk with their children to prepare them for each of the issues or potential problems. In addition, parents should strive to make their home as safe as possible from obvious dangers and hazards and rehearse the developed "emergency plan" with their children.

Being home alone can be a frightening and potentially dangerous situation for many children and adolescents. Parents should strive to limit the times when children are home alone. If your children are prepared, then the ride towards independence should be a smooth one.