



News Release

Family Life Month Packet 1997
Family & Consumer Sciences
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Planning for Children in Self-Care

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The number of children under the age of 13 who are left alone or left in the care of older siblings appears to be increasing. A national survey in 1987 found that 12 percent of parents of elementary school children and 30 percent of parents of middle school children left their children in self-care.

A more recent study using U.S. Census data indicates that more than 2 million American children are left unsupervised while parents are working. An estimated 43 percent of these children aged 6 to 12 and 76 percent of teenagers lack adult supervision after school.

Studies on families that use self-care find that the following characteristics tend to be evident:

- Self-care increases with the age of the children, the income of the parents and employment hours of the mother.
- Parental attitudes about self-care appear to be the determining factors in decision-making.
- Strong parental monitoring, patterns of child-rearing, age and characteristics of the child, the presence of good social relationships for both child and parents, and preferences for convenience of the self-care setting affect the decision to use self-care.

The physical, social, and emotional maturity of the child should be considered when leaving children in self-care. (Check with your local Department of Children's Services.)

Consider the following suggestions when leaving a child in self-care:

- Assess the safety of your home and neighborhood.
- Remove fire hazards and install smoke detectors.
- Let your child know the location and how to use the household emergency kit.
- Play a "what if" game with your child by acting out various situations that might occur and how to deal with them.
- Be specific about directions and generate rules and routines at a family meeting.
- Arrange some after-school activities and return home at a regular time.

Research indicates that planning ahead, good communication, an awareness of the child's abilities and feelings, and a positive attitude help make self-care an easier experience for both parent and child. More information about self-care and child age-level expectations can be obtained from your county office of Ohio State University Extension.

Extension
FactSheet

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