

## Teach Your Children:

- To memorize their name and address, including city and state.
- To memorize their phone number, including area code.
- To use both pushbutton and dial telephones to make emergency, local, and long distance calls and to reach the operator.
- To check in with you or a neighbor immediately after arriving home.
- To never go into your home if a door is ajar or a window is broken.
- How to work your home's door and window locks and to lock them when they are at home alone.
- How to answer the doorbell and telephone when they're home alone.
- Not to go into anyone else's home without your permission.
- To avoid walking or playing alone.
- That a stranger is someone that you or they don't know well.
- That if they feel they're being followed, either on foot or by a car, to run to the nearest public place, neighbor, or "Safe House."
- To tell you if anyone asks them to keep a secret, offers them gifts or money, or asks to take their picture.
- To always tell you if something happened while they were away from you that made them feel uncomfortable in any way.



This information is brought to you by  
The National Crime Prevention Council  
The Woodward Building  
733 15<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
[www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)  
and  
The Mesa Police Department  
[www.mesaaz.gov/police](http://www.mesaaz.gov/police)

**LATCHKEY  
CHILDREN  
YOUNG  
CHILDREN  
AT HOME**



**Mesa Police Department  
Crime Prevention  
480-644-2300**

**"Latchkey children."** It's a term that's often used to describe children who must stay at home alone taking care of themselves for some part of the day. Usually, they're the children of working parents. Always, they're the parents' worry.

Experts estimate that from 5 to 12 million children between the ages of 5 and 13 are at home alone for some period of time every day. In many cases, their parents either cannot afford child care or none is available.

Children in self-care are about three times more likely than those supervised by adults to be involved in accidents, engage in delinquent behavior or be victimized. And while no parents can be with their children all hours of every day, those who must leave their children at home alone on a regular basis often are gravely concerned about how well the children can cope, both with routine activities and potentially dangerous situations.

Some children enjoy caring for themselves and happily accept the added responsibilities. Others occasionally are lonely, bored and scared. For all of them, however, the self-care experience is an opportunity for parents to discuss all aspects of safety and crime prevention, as



well as build their children's self-esteem, confidence and competence. Moreover, studies show that a close relationship with parents decreases or moderates any negative effects of self-care.

### **Promoting Self-Care Skills**

To promote self-care skills, parents should focus on setting rules and limits, increasing levels of responsibility, and communicating basic safety information. If children understand why they must be left alone and what they may and may not do, their risk of injury and victimization - and their parent's worries - will be greatly decreased.

### **Exploring Community Resources**

In addition to working with their children on the "latchkey" situation, parents can explore the resources available in their communities and try to expand the options. For example:

Many volunteer groups run a "Phone Friend" program in their communities. This is a "warm line" that latchkey children can call if they're scared or lonely. It is not meant to replace regular contact with a parent or other trusted adult, but it could be a valuable resource, particularly for those parents whose jobs don't allow unlimited access to a telephone.

There may be "extended day" programs in your local school or sponsored by recreation



departments, churches, or neighborhood organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs or YMCA. Or you may be able to start one, with the help of other concerned parents. It is always a good idea to check with your children's school about their policies concerning absences and release of your children to anyone but you. Be sure the school will not accept phone calls stating that children will be picked up by someone other than their parents, and that the school will notify you if your child is not in class. Find out if there is a "Parent Alert" or "Callback" program or contact a local volunteer group - the American Association of Retired Persons or the PTA are examples - about starting one. This kind of program uses volunteers to call parents (even on their jobs) if their children are not in school.

### **Following Household Routines**

If your children are to be in charge of themselves at home, discuss the routines they are to follow -- household chores, pets to tend, homework, family policies on visiting friends or having friends visit them, and what to do when the telephone or doorbell rings. Also, if you're not going to be coming home at your regular time, let your children know!

