

Surviving Summer

Summer is the time for picnics, vacations and outdoor fun of all kinds. And, for some of us, the question is, “what am I going to do to keep my children safe, supervised and entertained?” With planning and some preparation, children can have fun and stay academically enriched during the summer — and parents can keep their sanity!

A recent survey of readers of the Children’s Hospital of Denver Magazine were asked what they would be doing for the summer. About half of the readers (52 percent) responded that they believed their summer would be “just the right amount of busy.” Yet an all too familiar complaint from “tweens” and adolescents is that they are “bored,” Survey takers in their early teens were most likely to say that they would be bored (40 percent) while only 10 percent said that they would be overscheduled. These numbers were nearly equal for the older teens. This result is not too surprising, as older teens are typically more independent, have increased responsibilities, and have had several summers of planning and organizing their lives. They are closer to transitioning to young adulthood and this is reflected in their decision making.

There are several strategies that parents may utilize to ensure that their children are not bored or overscheduled. Make the summer enjoyable for both children and their parents by planning the following for summer break:

- Engage children in the planning process. Plan ahead and have supplies on hand for indoor activities. If an activity is to take place outdoors, try to have an alternative plan if the weather does not cooperate.
- As the summer passes, review the summer plans that you have made to-date. Brainstorm ways to fill the gaps and discuss if a planned outing or event was successful.
- Mark all of the activities on a family-sized calendar and post it in a central location. Make sure to consider the needs of each child on the calendar.
- Insist on summertime learning. Summer outings may present opportunities to learn about history, geography, and nature. Encourage your child to keep a journal of activities, including pictures and postcards, to reinforce what they’ve learned on the outing.



- Revamp, but don’t eliminate, routine. You may loosen up on some chores e.g., Friday and Saturday can be “don’t make the bed day,” but it is important to keep other chores and routines intact. Planning for events, getting adequate rest and packing and organizing for events are all good summertime strategies.
- Develop and review safety procedures for kids, including both outdoor and indoor activities. For example, teach kids not to give out personal information on the phone or while on the Internet, or teach sun safety.
- Insist on summertime reading. Let your child choose the material. Explore the local library and become familiar with the summer programs offered.
- Set a bedtime. Getting the proper amount of sleep every night is important.
- Limit TV and video games.
- Reinstigate bedtimes and wake-up times two weeks before the start of the school year – this helps kids adjust back to the school routine.
- Play and exercise.
- Help around the house.

The transition to staying home alone

If a decision is made to allow an older child to stay home



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alone, there are steps that can be taken to make this transition as smooth as possible.

- Establish a list of rules, including how many and which friends can visit; what to do if a stranger comes to the door or calls; what things are “off limits” without a parent home, what snacks can be eaten and what meals can be prepared; and how time alone will be spent.
- Agree on a specific time for check-in phone calls. These should occur daily and more than once per day. Establish a back-up plan if the parent is not able to answer or if the child does not answer when contacted.
- Chores and projects should be a part of the afternoon routine.
- Keep a weekly schedule and checklist. The routine will help your child to feel secure and responsible.
- Provide your child with rewards for assuming this responsibility. These can be in the form of verbal praise or a tangible reward such as a new game, clothing, or other treat.
- Talk to your child often and review how things are going. Be flexible. Work together to build your child’s confidence.

Summer can be a challenging time for parents but with some planning, it can also be rewarding and memorable for parents and their children. Have fun! ❖

Is your child ready to stay home alone?

Use the readiness questionnaire on Page 3 to help decide.

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Is your child ready to stay home alone?

Due to the current state of the economy, the cost of child care or a summer camp may be beyond a family’s budget, so some parents may try to save money by having their child stay home alone. As a parent begins to consider the idea of self-care for a child, it is a good idea to consider all options first.

A family can look into offerings at the library, churches or community centers. Shared-care with another family may be an option. A combination of several alternatives, although requiring coordination, may save money and provide educational and fun environments.

For some children, staying home alone is exciting and viewed as a new level of responsibility and trust. For others, the idea may be frightening, overwhelming and lonely at times. They may experience stress and anxiety regarding this option.

Although Michigan does not have a state law specifying how old a child must be to be left alone, it utilizes other guidelines. One of these is Michigan’s Child Protection Handbook. The section that discusses “Improper Supervision” states: “According to the Child Protection Law, there is no legal age that a child can be left home alone. It is determined on a case-by-case basis but as rule of thumb, a child 10 years old and younger is not responsible enough to be left home alone. A child over the age of 10 and under the age of 12 will be evaluated, but the case may not always be assigned to a Child Protective Service (CPS) Investigation.”

This does not mean that every 12-year-old child is ready to be left home alone. In fact, a good starting point is assessing readiness. The following is an example of a readiness questionnaire:

YES NO

		The child can recognize a situation in which help is needed and can dial 911 immediately.
		The child knows the home address and phone number.
		The child knows his parents’ work and/or cell phone numbers.
		The child knows how to reach responsible adults by phone.
		The child knows how to give directions to their home.
		The child has demonstrated correct procedures for handling strangers on the phone.
		The child has demonstrated correct procedures for handling strangers at the door.
		The child has been educated in cyber-safety and knows not to give out personal information on the Internet.
		The child can name two adults to contact in an emergency.
		The child can name two neighbors to contact if help is needed.
		The child will inform parents of situations in which they felt afraid.
		The child can inform parents of how to handle minor injuries and apply first aid.
		The child knows where first aid supplies are kept in the home.
		The child can identify two escape routes in the home in case of fire.
		The child can identify where to seek shelter in severe storms.
		The child can name five household rules.
		The child can describe a time when they had to solve a problem without asking a parent or other adult.
		The child feels safe when alone and is not afraid of the dark.
		The child has indicated an interest or willingness to stay on their own.

This survey may be used as guide to assess if your child has some readiness toward being home alone. It is good to have at least two adults complete the survey. Once completed, review the areas in which your child will continue to require education.