



University of California
Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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PREPARING SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN FOR SELF CARE

Summer...No school... For parents, the end of the school year means finding out-of-school care for their children or possibly a child spending time alone during the day without adult supervision. At some point during each child's development, families start to think about letting children supervise themselves. Self care can be a rewarding experience for children who are ready for it. It can help them develop independence and responsibility and can give them confidence. However self care can be a frightening and dangerous situation if a child is not ready.

There is no magic age at which children develop the maturity and good sense needed to stay alone. Set up a trial period of a week or two to try out self-care and see how it works. That takes some of the pressure off the child. It also insures that you and your child will talk about how it is going and change the arrangement if needed.

When a child is in self care, establish rules. How does he or she know what is OK to do and what is not. Most situations can be handled by a child if he or she is aware of an established rule. Here are some guidelines for establishing rules.

- Rules should be reasonable. Families should talk about each rule and agree that it is important. Rules that are made without agreement will not be followed.
- Rules should be clearly stated. Kids in self care do a better job of following rules if they know exactly what to do and when. "Be good" or "clean the house" are not clear enough.

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- The child should understand the reason for the rule. Good rules have good reasons. Helping the child understand the rule helps him see why it is important and helps him follow it.
- Consequences for not following a rule should be clear.
- Be consistent in enforcing the rules. Exceptions to the rules can be confusing. It is better to have a few rules that are good ones than inconsistent rules.
- Write down the rules on a piece of paper and post in a place that can be seen. Your child can refer to this list as a reminder of things that you agreed upon.

Some rules to included are: What can be eaten and when, leaving the house, having friends in the house, using the phone, doing chores, watching TV and answering the door and phone.

Planning, talking and a positive atmosphere can help make self-care a rewarding experience for both parents and children. Keeping lines of communication open so everyone can speak honestly about the self-care experience will help eliminate fears and build self esteem in youth.

Source: “ Keys for Kids” Project, University of Wisconsin-Extension

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