



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT



Teaching your kids how to be home alone safely

By Jane Sutter

So many things can go wrong unexpectedly when kids are home alone. How can parents teach their children to respond to a variety of emergencies, like an overflowing toilet or a burn from a spilled cup of hot chocolate? Not to mention the dangers of strangers coming to the front door.

Lynn Fulmore teaches classes for kids ages 7 to 12 about how to make smart decisions when they are home alone, or home with siblings and the parents are not. Fulmore is the founder and master instructor of EPIC Trainings: Emergency Preparedness Instruction and Certification.

A retired paramedic, Fulmore and her associates (many are retired teachers) teach these classes at area recreation centers and at gatherings of church youth groups, Boy and Girl Scout troops, etc.

Topics covered include basic first aid, handling strangers at the door, answering the phone, internet safety and reacting to emergencies like power outages and fires. What follows here is just a portion of what Fulmore teaches in class.

Knowing first aid

Usually the younger kids (such as ages 7-8) in the class are not going to be home alone, but with an older sibling, Fulmore said. Knowing basic first aid is a popular concern for parents of younger kids, Fulmore said, because what if the older sibling gets injured? Would a younger child know what to do?

Fulmore said parents should make sure the children know where the first aid kit/box/drawer is in the house and that it be accessible to the kids, not up on a high

shelf where kids can't reach it. Parents should check the first aid kit periodically, such as when they set the clocks forward or back, to make sure it is well stocked with bandages and other items.

Phone connections

Nowadays, many homes no longer have landlines. Parents have cell phones, but if the child doesn't have a cell phone, how can he or she call 911, a parent, a neighbor, etc.? Fulmore says sometimes a parent will say "I don't feel my 9-year-old is old enough to have a cell phone." Fulmore counters that with: "If you think they're not old enough to have a cell phone, then they're probably not old enough to stay home alone because it's equal responsibility. And now they're left home alone

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without a means of communication. That is really concerning, whether it's calling 911 because someone's injured, calling 911 because there's a fire or someone's at the door and they're scared."

On the topic of cell phones, Fulmore recommends that parents program not just their cell phone numbers into their child's phone, but also their office numbers. Other numbers to include might be the movie theater if the parents have gone to the movies; stores such as Walmart or Target if a parent is shopping there because calls might get dropped; the phone number of a trusted neighbor.

For example, if there's a power outage in the home, if the child has a neighbor's phone number, he can call there to see if they have power. Those phone numbers should also be posted somewhere accessible, such as on the refrigerator, Fulmore said. This could include a list of any allergies a child might have, which is important information if there is a medical emergency.

Who can a child trust?

Fulmore recommends that parents teach their children the difference between someone they know versus someone who is a family member or a trusted family friend. For example, the mail carrier may be someone the child knows, and that can give the child a false sense of familiarity. Even if a child has been instructed not to answer the door when home alone, she may think: "Oh, I know that's the mailman, so if he's ringing the bell (and holding a package), I'll open the door."

Fulmore tells her students: "No, you really don't know the mail carrier. He can leave the package outside."

Even if a parent is home — whether awake or sleeping — the child should be instructed to not answer the door but get the parent and let them know someone is at the door.

Fulmore also expressed concern about



the service that allows packages to be delivered inside a home's garage via electronic access. For example, say a child home alone goes out to the garage to get something out of a freezer. The garage door could be open and a stranger could be inside delivering a package. "It's another layer of security that you shouldn't let lapse for your convenience," she said.

What is a child's greatest fear when home alone?

Fulmore asks her students that question. "Their No. 1 fear is that their parents will get hurt and not make it home," Fulmore said. She finds that answer heart-breaking and a good reminder that kids really do love their parents. If parents are running late and won't be home at the expected time, they should call their children so as to relieve any uncertainty or anxiety for them.

If a fire breaks out:

Of all the topics that Fulmore and her associates cover in class, Fulmore said the

most difficult concept for children to grasp is what to do if there is a fire in the house where there are siblings. Fulmore tells the children that if the house is on fire, "You get out. That means you leave everything and everyone, and you get to the (designated) meeting place, and your job is to call 911 and let them know who's left inside the house. That is the hardest concept for them to grasp, that they would not get their sibling or look for their brother or sister."

Of course, if a child's sibling is in the same room, "grab hands and go," Fulmore said. But if a sibling is upstairs or downstairs, she wants the child to yell upstairs on the way out the door to grab their attention but do not go upstairs for them. "We explain to them how heartbreaking it would be for them if both of their parents did not come home. How horrible it would be. If one came home, at least you have the one. That's how your parents would feel about a fire."

She said kids don't like hearing this and sometimes they get emotional, but they understand why Fulmore is telling them this. She emphasizes to them: "This is terrible, but this is the responsibility, and if you don't feel like you are ready (to be home without a parent), be honest with your parents. It doesn't mean that you are not mature, it means that you are responsible and you are mature to say that I don't think I'm ready for this quite yet."

Cooking while alone

Due to concern about fires and burns, *Continued on page 3*

SAFE AT HOME CLASSES:

EPIC Trainings: Emergency Preparedness Instruction & Certifications offers two-hour classes to help kids be prepared to be home alone safely. It also offers classes for children, adults, professionals and lay responders on CPR, first aid, babysitter's training, coach's safety, internet safety, OSHA trainings and "Just Yell FIRE," a self-defense awareness class for females ages 11 through college-age.

For more information, go to <https://www.epictrainings.com/> or call Lynn Fulmore at 585-615-4379 or send an email to email@epictrainings.com.

Fulmore teaches kids not to use the stove or the microwave or any kitchen appliance when home alone. She said the two top things that kids burn themselves is microwave popcorn (due to the steam coming out of the bag when a child tries to open it) and spilled hot chocolate. Often microwaves are mounted high up and under a cabinet, at eye level for an adult, but not for a child. So the child in taking a cup of hot chocolate out of the microwave could spill it on themselves and suffer a burn.

"There are so many things to consider that are second nature for us (parents) because we've done it for so long, but for kids there are so many things that can go wrong," Fulmore stated. Even a tiny piece of foil left on a microwavable snack container can start a fire in a microwave, for example.

To help kids think of snacks or meals that don't require cooking, Fulmore asks each child in class to share one idea, and the kids will come up with a long list of ideas.

What if the toilet overflows?

That's one topic that most parents don't think of as they prepare their child or children to be home alone, Fulmore said. When she asks her students what they would do if the toilet overflows, she most often hears "shut the bathroom door and wait for the parent to come home."

Of course, that could result in a parent coming home to a real mess. If the toilet



is plugged and overflowing, Fulmore instructs, "Don't flush again" no matter how embarrassed the child may feel. An older child might be able to use a plunger. Most kids don't know how to shut off the water flow, so Fulmore takes her students into a restroom and shows them where the shut-off valve is for the toilet.

When are kids ready to be left alone?

In New York State, there is no law regarding at what age children can be left alone at home. "That is for a reason, because ev-

ery child is different," Fulmore said.

Her son at age 8 was able to stay home for short periods of time, such as his mother going out to pick up a prescription and coming right back, Fulmore said. Her daughter was quite different and was not mature enough to stay home until age 12. "So, knowing your children, knowing their strengths" is important for parents to make that decision.

Fulmore said she's finding that more parents are leaving their children home alone on days when schools are closed for superintendent conference days or holidays. "Parents just don't have that many days off" available to stay home. Her classes are especially popular in May and June prior to schools closing for the summer and parents are deciding if their kids are responsible enough to be home on their own, even for part of a day.

Her classes also are popular with parents (including teachers) who need to leave for work early in the morning before the child's school bus arrives. So the child is alone and responsible for getting ready for school. Or sometimes a parent may be home but because they work a night shift, they are sleeping or napping, so they want their kids to be safe.

While parents do not attend the classes with their children, Fulmore does ask parents to arrive 15 minutes before the class ends to hear directly from their children about what they have learned. After the class, she emails out a workbook to the parents as a follow-up tool.

Jane Sutter is a Rochester-area freelance writer.

TIPS ON KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AT HOME:

Here are additional ideas from HomeAdvisor Powered by Angi:

Flashlights and emergency kits: Show children where the flashlights are kept and make sure they are always loaded with fresh batteries. Separate from your First Aid Kit, put together an emergency kit containing things like a wind-up radio and important family documents. Show the kids where to find it and what to do with it should a sudden disaster take place.

How to work the alarm system: If you have a security alarm system, practice interacting with it so the kids are comfortable setting it, turning off certain features, and manually triggering it in case of an emergency. It's best not to show them how to disable it fully and allow unexpected visitors or intruders.

Put away hazardous items: Remove

or securely lock away items and weapons that can cause accidental harm like lighters, matches, guns, ammunition and knives. Safely put away any alcohol, medications and household cleaners that can be poisonous if swallowed, like detergents, bleach, pesticides, cleaning products and flammable liquids.

Internet, game and TV limits: Put restrictions on the internet and TV to make sure your kids do not have access to content that would be inappropriate. Put away adult content like violent video games or R-rated movies that you'd rather they not see. With you not there to monitor their access, they may — intentionally or not — stumble across material that could cause them distress.

For more tips, go to <https://www.homeadvisor.com/r/child-safety-guide-home-alone/>

Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**



Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

Withdraws from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos

... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:

Tammy Sylvester,
Diocesan Coordinator
of Safe Environment Education
and Compliance,
585-328-3228
or Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimassistance@dor.org.

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ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>

PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>

A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Darkness to Light organization:

www.d2l.org

Darkness to Light is a non-profit committed to empowering adults to prevent child sexual abuse.

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>

Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center

(Monroe, Wayne counties):

www.BivonaCAC.org

585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:

607-737-8449

www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:

315-253-9795

www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program

(Ontario County):

www.cacfingerlakes.org

315-548-3232

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:

www.sthcs.org

716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry

(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):

1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)

866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:

www.theadvocacycenter.org

607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:

585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:

315-531-3417, Ext. 6