



Connect with Kids

After the Bell

Parent Tip Sheet

WHAT WE KNOW

After school activities and programs are very important not only for a child's safety but also for a child's development. In after school programs, children of all ages develop social and academic skills and build crucial relationships with mentoring adults. Children who attend these programs are less likely to participate in risky behaviors such as skipping school, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, trying drugs and/or other detrimental or anti-social behaviors. Also noteworthy is that children who consistently participate in after-school activities are more likely to attend college, volunteer in community service and vote.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are times when parents may not be able to find a quality after school program available for their children, or it may be that such a program is not financially feasible. For those parents who must leave their children alone after school, experts offer the following suggestions:

- **Set up clear, fair ground rules.** Children should call to check in as soon as they arrive home and be available to talk to a parent whenever he/she calls. When the conversation occurs, be sure to check on what homework they have, which chores need to be completed and ask how they are feeling and/or how their day has been so far. Make it a caring call, not just a checklist.
- **Establish limitations on computer use, television viewing, phone calls and video games.** All recreational electronics really should be off limits until homework and chores are completed, and parents should consider setting up guidelines for times when these devices are in use. Moreover, parents need to review and establish which games, programs and sites are age appropriate for their children.
- **Create guidelines for the phone.** Consider leaving all phone calls to the answering

machine except for parent calls. Set up an important and/or emergency phone number list and make sure it is readily available and easy to read. Help young children practice making emergency calls, so they know what to say and who to call in different situations.

- **Create guidelines for answering the door.** Insist children do not open the door for anyone, even neighborhood friends, until a parent is home.
- **Set rules for neighborhood play/outdoor time.** Unless a neighbor or relative is there to supervise, it is wise to insist children stay indoors until a responsible adult is home.
- **Contact a neighbor, friend or relative as an emergency contact.** Make sure there is an adult everyone trusts that they can go to if you are suddenly unavailable or unreachable by phone.
- **For older children who have access to a car, establish driving rules.** Once an agenda is set, there are to be no unapproved changes. No cell phones, no unapproved teen passengers in the first six months of driving, and always wear seatbelts.

RESOURCES

"After-school Peril for Teen Drivers,"
by Larry Copeland, October 25, 2006, USA Today,
www.usatoday.com

Child Trends Data Bank,
www.childtrendsdatabank.com

Kids Health,
www.kidshealth.com

Journal of Adolescent Research,
www.sagepub.com/journals

MSNBC Interactive,
www.msnbc.msn.com

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
Administration for Children and Families, Child
Care Bulletin,
<http://nccic.org/ccb>