

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and Prevent Child Abuse
North Dakota**

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**Summer break means more children staying home alone; guidance on
child supervision available for parents and caregivers**

BISMARCK, N.D. – School will soon be out for the summer. It is a welcome break for some, but for parents or caregivers, it can mean having to decide if their children can stay home alone. This decision may leave many families with questions about when it is safe for children to be without adult supervision.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division and Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota have an informational brochure available called *Home Alone: Is Your Child Ready?* that provides guidance and answers some of the most common child supervision questions. The brochure is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/family.html.

“There is no state law in North Dakota that specifies the age a child can stay home alone or babysit another child,” said Marlys Baker, child protection services administrator for the department. “Age is not the only factor parents should consider when making their decision. There are guidelines used by county social service offices when assessing reports of children who are inadequately supervised. I encourage parents not only to talk to their children about safe “home alone” strategies, but to test their knowledge by asking questions like ‘what would you do if a stranger knocks at the door,’ or ‘what do you do if friends come over and break the rules in our house.’”

Home Alone: Is Your Child Ready? outlines several factors parents should weigh in their decision-making process, including age, emotional well-being and maturity, length of time their child would be alone along with the time of day or night, their child’s physical or mental limitations, and the accessibility of a parent or other adults. The brochure also touches on other factors to consider such as self-care and home safety strategies.

Baker added that if families make their decision with these factors in mind, it can help create a more positive experience for both parents and children.

“Communication also plays an important role in determining a child’s ability to stay home alone,” said Sandy Tibke, executive director of Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota. “Parents should simply ask their child about their feelings, and if there is any hesitation, parents may want to wait until their child is more prepared. Never assume your child is ready just because he or she is 12 or 13 years old.”

Parents and caregivers with questions on child supervision guidelines can also contact their county social service office. Contact information is at www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/.

Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota and the North Dakota State University Extension Service Parent Resource Centers also offer helpful information and training opportunities for parents and caregivers. Details can be found on their websites: www.pcand.org and <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pen>.

The Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division and other public and private partners work to strengthen families and promote child well-being.

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