

## Home Alone

School's out and many Minnesota children are spending significant amounts of time home alone. How do you know if your child is ready to be left alone – and for how long and under what circumstances? And what steps can you take to make sure your child is prepared when the time comes? Here are Marti's answers to these important questions:

### I. Potential problems faced by children who are home alone

- Accidents (e.g. cooking fires; risky activities)
- Experiments with alcohol or other substances (often related to peer pressure)
- Victimization
- Feeling emotionally insecure or frightened

### II. What parents can do

- 1) Assess your child's readiness to care for self  
*There is no magic age at which a child is ready; look at the child's skills, responsibility, assertiveness and strength in resisting peer pressure, knowledge of what to do in emergency, ability to keep a cool head.*
- 2) Gradually ease child into self-care  
*Practice in small increments while you're close at hand.*
- 3) Set clear rules, expectations & values  
*It's powerful to say, "I trust you to make a good decision." But you need to explain what you mean by good decisions.*
- 4) Role-play tough situations  
*For example, what do you say when peers pressure you and tell you, "Your parents will never know!"*
- 5) Set up a monitoring system  
*Check in by phone, e-mail or unannounced drop-ins (by parent or a caring neighbor).*