

# Parent CONNECTIONS

## Creating a "No Cell Phone Zone"

*The cell phone is a modern luxury that, for many of us, has become a virtual necessity. It allows us to be in constant communication with our family members; we can call from the grocery store to ask someone at home if we need milk; we can reach our children and they can reach us at all times; we can call if we get stranded by the roadside or if we are stuck in traffic. There's no argument that cell phones can be very convenient. However, there is another side to cell phone use that isn't so helpful to families.*

### Cell phone usage can interfere with relationship-building opportunities

Talking on the phone while in the car takes away from the natural conversations we have with our kids. Some of the best parent/child talks happen while going to basketball practice, the grocery store, or on the way home from school. Kids share things while in the car that they wouldn't share while sitting across the dining room table. It's a time when nothing else is happening and no one else is interrupting. It's a precious time when kids know they are being listened to and that they have a captive audience.

Talking on the phone when entering a child care facility, preschool, or similar program prevents us from building strong relationships with the adults who spend so much time with our kids. We miss the opportunity to hear what's happening in the program, how our kids are progressing, any challenges they are facing, and the successes they have worked so hard to achieve. We also give the impression that we are not interested in building that relationship, which is one of the most important relationships we can cultivate.

### Make a decision to designate certain areas as "no cell phone zones"

- Turn the ringer off while driving in the car. The phone call can wait for a few minutes.
- Let your older kids with cell phones know this policy applies to them as well, including texting.
- Make an effort to connect with the child care providers, preschool teachers and other important adults in your child's life when dropping kids off and picking them up.

*Small changes like this will have lasting benefits for our children and our families.*



## Is Your Child Ready to be Left Home Alone?

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This is an important issue for families. There are many factors that come into play; child care expenses can be a large part of a families' budget, older children may feel they have outgrown the afterschool program or child care program they participate in, or it may be a hassle for parents to drop kids off or pick them up in a timely manner.

### What Oregon Law says

Although the law does not specify the age at which a child can be left alone, a child younger than ten cannot be left unattended for such a period of time as may likely endanger their health or welfare (ORS 163.545). It is considered Child Neglect in the Second Degree, a Class A Misdemeanor, to do so.

The law is vague because all children mature at different ages. One age would not be the right age for every child. Most people would agree that ten year olds are not likely to have the maturity to handle the many situations or crises which could arise before an adult arrives home.

The decision isn't easy, but here are some guidelines from The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

**Assess your child.** Does he or she have the personality, self-confidence, and judgment skills to accept this responsibility? Will the experience be positive and help build the child's self-image? Will the experience create anxiety in a child who is afraid to stay alone? Having a family meeting to talk about this is a good place to start. House rules, expectations and the daily routine of each

family member should be defined. You may want to have follow-up meetings to make sure things are still working. Identify any changes that need to be made. Here are some steps to take.

### **Before allowing your child to go home alone, you should...**

- Find out if there are other community resources or organizations providing after-school care or support. Or places your child can go at least some days for activities and support.
- Ask your child how he or she feels about being alone. Is your child afraid to be left alone, or does he or she have the maturity and want to assume that responsibility?
- Decide if you feel your child is able to follow directions and solve problems on his or her own.
- Decide how long your child will be alone. Think about how available you or another trusted adult will be in case of an emergency. See how safe the neighborhood is by contacting your local law-enforcement agency and checking the frequency and types of crime in your area.
- Make sure you've set specific rules to be followed by your child while he or she is alone. Give your child specific instructions about how to reach you at all times. Include information about what your child should do if they can't reach you right away.
- Remember you're in charge, even if it is from a distance.

### **Once you've decided to proceed, you should check to make sure your child knows...**

- His or her full name, address, and telephone number.
- Your full name, the exact name of the place where you work, your work number, and any pager or cell numbers you may have.
- How to make a telephone call to request help in an emergency using 911 or the appropriate number(s) in your area.
- How to carry his or her key so it is hidden and safe. Your name and address should not be on the key. It may be wise to leave an extra key with a trusted friend or neighbor.
- Not to walk or play alone on the way home, and never take shortcuts home.
- What to do if he or she is being followed. If that happens your child should turn around, run in the opposite direction. They should then go to a designated place to get help and tell a trusted adult.

- To always check the home before entering. Look for such things as open, ajar, or broken doors and windows, or anything that doesn't look right. Go to a designated safe place to call for help if something doesn't seem right.
- To always lock the door after entering and make sure the house is secure.
- To immediately check in with you upon returning home to let you know he or she has arrived safely.
- To tell callers you can't come to the telephone. Offer to take a message instead of letting people know he or she is home alone.
- Not to open the door for or talk to anyone who comes to the home unless the person is a trusted family friend or relative. He or she must feel comfortable being alone with that person, and the visit has been pre-approved by you.
- To stay alert for true emergencies such as a fire or gas-main leak that would require the need to leave the home.
- To check with you or another trusted adult if he or she is unsure about anything.

### **As a parent or guardian, you should make sure you have...**

- A daily schedule of homework, chores, and activities for your child to follow.
- A list near the phone including numbers for you, law enforcement, the fire department, an ambulance service, your doctor, a poison-control center, and a trusted adult who's available in case of an emergency.
- Written instructions about which appliances may be used.
- What to do in case of fire; and how to get out of the house if there is a fire.
- A plan if you are late coming home. What to do if your child's plans change.
- Instructions about watching television, using a computer, talking on the phone, or inviting friends over when you aren't home.
- Time to talk about the day's events with your child. Make sure he or she knows it is okay to discuss anything with you, especially something that may have made him or her feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

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**1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**

**[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)**

## **Struggling with Child Care Payments?**

See if you qualify for Employment Related Day Care, through the Department of Human Services. These offices also handle food stamps, Oregon Health Plan and cash assistance programs.

**Ashland**, 482-2041; **Medford**, 776-6172; **White City**, 846-8700; **Grants Pass** 474-3101; **Cave Junction** 592-4149

**Online:** [www.dhs.state.or.us](http://www.dhs.state.or.us), click on Children & Teens, Child Care-Parent Info, Copay Estimate