

# WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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## Staying home alone

### Questions and tips about preparing for your child's first time home alone

Millions of children across America stay home alone for a few hours from time to time. Yet, deciding if your child is ready for this big step is often difficult. Although this decision depends on many different factors, this article addresses various issues that are important to keep in mind when making your decision. In addition, there are several tips regarding your child's first time alone.

Dr. Marilyn Heins, M.D., F.A.A.P. says, "If I had my druthers, I would say ten years old is early enough to be home alone. But many kids are mature enough at eight to be left alone (really alone, eight years old is too young to be responsible for a sibling)." According to Heins, a parent should begin to make this decision by assessing your child's readiness. Some important questions to ask include,

- ◆ Is your child physically mature enough to stay at home alone (for example, does your child have the physical dexterity to use a key)?
- ◆ Is your child mentally prepared (can your child recognize danger and problem solve at least to the level of calling for help)?
- ◆ Does your child have emotional maturity (the child is not too shy to call a neighbor for help and can talk about and handle feelings of loneliness or boredom)?

If the answers to these and other similar questions are yes, then below are some things you can do to prepare your child to be home alone.

- ◆ Teach your child how to get out of the house in an emergency (like a fire).
- ◆ Be sure your child knows the full address and phone number of the house and how a parent can be reached.
- ◆ Teach your child how to use the 911 system.
- ◆ Role play with your child (i.e. Ask, "What would you do if popcorn caught on fire in the microwave?, What would you do if you lost your key?).
- ◆ Establish boundaries (where are your kids allowed to go, what are they allowed to do, how long can they be at one place or another, how long can they use the phone).

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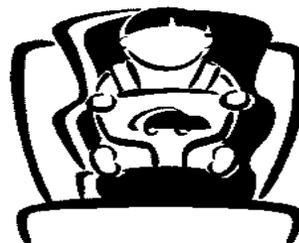
## Car Seat 101

Car seats are a fact of life for families with young children. Because of this, the investment in the right car seat is an important decision. Not only are they important in providing safety while traveling, but also the law in most states requires them.

Here are some common types of seats and the benefits of using each type.

**Rear-Facing Seats** *Consumer Reports* advocates the use of a rear-facing seat as long as the child is able to fit into it. Children should ride in a semi-reclined, rear facing position with full support of the head, neck, and back until they are at least 1 year old and weigh at least 20 pounds.

**Infant Seats** This type of car seat usually doubles as a carrier, and can also be used when traveling. They provide convenience if one uses them with the base. This allows the ease of putting them in and taking them out of the car. Unfortunately, seats without bases tend to provide more sound crash protection if installed properly.



**Convertible Seats** Although this type of car seat does not conveniently double as a carrier, they can hold larger babies who are at a size that falls in between the infant seat and the forward facing seat. According to *Consumer Reports*, toddlers weighing between 20 and 40 pounds should be placed in either convertible seats or booster seats. Convertible seats can be turned around from a rear-facing to a front-facing position for children over the age of one and between 20 and 40 pounds.

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## Home Alone- From Page 1

- ◆ Go over who can come over to the house and teach them to use the peephole. Teach them about strangers and their various tactics. Explain what to do in the event of a break-in.
- ◆ Tell your child what to do if anyone calls while they're home alone. Tell them to respond by saying, "My Mom/Dad can't come to the phone right now, can I take a message?" Make sure they know not to tell anyone they're home alone.
- ◆ Have your child notify you immediately if they receive any unusual or phony phone calls.
- ◆ Assure your child that you trust him/her and that you believe he/she is big enough to obey all the rules and stay at home alone safely.
- ◆ Work out a schedule. Have your child make out a chart (call mom, snack, homework, etc.). All chores assigned can be on the chart too.
- ◆ Pay attention to your son or daughter's feelings. Ask your child to tell you about anything that makes him or her feel uncomfortable about staying home alone. Tell your child you understand and remember how it feels to be lonely or bored.
- ◆ Ask each day what happened while you were away and talk about the "day" each one of you had.
- ◆ Explain that you expect that homework will always be done and that schoolwork should always be taken seriously.

\*More of Dr. Marilyn Heins' tips for parents can be found at:  
<http://www.Parentkidsright.com>

## HAVE YOUR KIDS TAKE THE QUIZ (AGES 8 AND UP)

### 1. What do you say when someone calls and asks to talk to your Mom or Dad when you're home alone?

- a) "They are not home right now."
- b) "They cannot come to the phone right now, can I take a message?"
- c) "You have the wrong number."

### 2. What do you do if someone rings the doorbell?

- a) Tell the person at the door that you are not allowed to open the door when you are home alone.
- b) Answer the door right away, it might be the mailman.
- c) Ask whom it is, check through the peephole, & open the door if it's someone you know.

### 3. What do you do if something catches fire in the kitchen?

- a) Leave the kitchen, call 911, and leave the house.
- b) Try to blow out the flames.
- c) Stop, Drop, & Roll.

## How to stay in Touch...

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**\*Please help us stay in  
contact with you!**

We would like to keep your address and phone number current so that we can continue sending you updates on the project.

## QUIZ (CONT.)

### 4. What do you do if a stranger or someone you don't know follows you back from school when no one is home?

- a) Tell the stranger to stop following you. You might convince the stranger to leave you alone.
- b) Go to a nearby neighbor that you know is home.
- c) Hide from the stranger.

### 5. What should you do when the electricity goes out in the house?

- a) Light some candles in each room of the house, especially the hallways.
- b) Check the electricity box and connect broken wires.
- c) Get a flashlight and call your Mom or Dad to tell them the electricity went out.

*Answers to quiz: 1) b 2) c 3) a 4) b 5) c*

## KEEPING YOUR KIDS CONTENT ON THOSE LONG CAR RIDES

Today is the day you have been anticipating. You are about to take the kids on a long car ride. Perhaps you are going on vacation or you are on your way to the University of Wisconsin to participate in a twin study. You have only been in the car for ten minutes and you hear the dreaded question, "are we there yet?" Luckily, with a few simple educational games you can keep your sanity while keeping your kids content.



Even before you pull out of your driveway, there are a few necessities you should consider packing for the ride.

- ❑ Pillows and Blankets
- ❑ Books
- ❑ Music
- ❑ Arts and Crafts
- ❑ Video Games
- ❑ Food and Drinks

For children who prefer to play more interactive games, there are a number of car games that require little to no preparation and are fun and easy to play. Not only will these games make your car trip more enjoyable, but they are also educational.

❑ **The Semi Search Game:** This game is fun to play and all you need is a writing utensil and a piece of paper to keep track of each player's score. Each player chooses a color and every time they see a semi truck displaying their chosen color, that player receives one point. White, black, green, red, yellow and blue are good colors to use since these are the most common semi truck colors. The game is played until one player reaches fifty points, though this number can be raised or lowered depending on the length of your car trip.

❑ **Traveling Bingo:** To make the Bingo cards for this game, just draw five columns of five boxes each on the center of a sheet of paper. At the top of the page, write the word BINGO so that one letter is at the top of each column. Then place stickers of objects that will be seen during the drive (such as horses, cars, planes, fire trucks, barns and fences) on the cards, one in each box. It is recommended that you make a few sets of cards so that you can play the game more than once. To play the game, each player is given a game card and a writing utensil. As the children see the objects on their cards, they mark an X over them. The first person to complete a row, whether horizontally, vertically or diagonally wins.

❑ **The Alphabet Game:** This is a pretty well known traveling game, but the rules can be altered to change the level of difficulty depending on the age of your children.

### ❑ **Alphabet Game (Cont.):**

For younger children, you can write down the letters of the alphabet on a sheet of paper and every time they see a letter, they mark it off. To make the game more challenging, you can limit letter searching to only license plates and billboards, one letter per plate or billboard. You could also assign people on either the left or right sides of the car to teams while looking for letters, though the team on the left may have to look at receding signs. The goal of the game is to be the first one through the entire alphabet.

❑ **The Cow Game:** Perfect for Wisconsin travelers, this game uses teams with the passengers on the left side of the car forming one team and competing with passengers on the right side. Each team can only look out the windows on their side of the car. During the car trip, each team will keep track of the number of cows they see. The goal of the game is to try and spot more cows than the opposing team. The challenge is that every time you pass a body of water the team sitting on the side of the car closest to the body of water loses all of their points and has to begin again.

For more ideas about car games, you can check out the book *Miles of Smiles*, which is filled with fun car activities or you can print out a free activity book at <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/books/cartravelbook>

### Car Seat 101 From Page 1

**Booster Seats** Booster seats can be used with their internal harness for toddlers weighing 20-40 pounds and can later be used as booster seats as your child gets older. For children over 40 pounds, these seats can be used in conjunction with the automobile's safety belt. Most children at this weight are not yet tall enough to be able to get proper use out of a seatbelt alone, so the use of the booster seat puts them in a position where the seatbelt can provide quality protection.

In addition to finding the right car seat for your child, it is also extremely important to assure that the device is used correctly. Many consumer advocacy groups have found that when car seats are used improperly they do not provide the safety they should in times of need. Although there are many possible reasons why car seats fail to be effective, one way to assure a correct fit is to check with your local police department. Many cities offer opportunities to meet with traffic enforcement officers who are experts in this area.

There are a lot of options out there for parents to choose from. A good deal of your decision will depend on how quickly your child is growing so that the car seat will be properly matched with their size. For specific brand recommendations visit <http://www.Consumerreports.org>