

# TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#9

1/06

## IS YOUR CHILD READY TO STAY ALONE?

In Maine, there is not a specific age when the law allows children to stay home alone. Because children mature at different rates, it is very important to know if your children feel comfortable being home alone. Are they ready to handle an emergency or an unexpected event? Are they level headed? Do they stay calm or are they nervous?

It may be helpful to begin the process of leaving your children home alone gradually. Start by leaving your children briefly to run an errand or arranging to arrive home 15 minutes later from work. Ask your children if they feel comfortable and what they did with their time. Encourage communication about their fears and expectations.

### **Prepare your child to be ready for emergency situations. Go over the following:**

- Their full name, address and phone number.
- The full name and phone number of your designated back-up person.
- Your full name and contact information at work.
- The phone number for emergency services.
- Tell the children not to enter the house if a door or window is open or broken.
- What to do if someone knocks on the door.
- The location of a working flashlight if the power should fail.
- An escape route in the event of a fire.
- The exact location of your household's first aid kit (if you do not own one, buy one).
- The safety rules and routines of your home

### **Consider your child's maturity level and their ability to handle a variety of situations.**

- Is s/he physically able to lock and unlock the doors?
- Has s/he handled brief periods of time alone well?
- Can s/he manage basic tasks like fixing a snack and taking phone messages?
- Has s/he handled being alone for brief periods of time well?
- Does s/he know when to seek outside help?
- Can s/he solve small problems himself/herself?
- Will s/he follow house rules?
- Will s/he be lonely or frightened by himself/herself?

### **Steps you can take to ease your worries and help protect your child while you're not home?**

- Come together as a family and go over the rules of your home.
- Talk about what to do if a stranger comes to the door, or if friends want to come over.
- Decide together what snacks are appropriate and how much.
- Decide what activities are off limits until a parent is home, and how the time will be spent.
- Upon returning home, talk with them about their feelings and how they spent their time.