



# Safely Home

a guide for parents  
and caregivers



New Zealand Government

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## - a guide for parents and caregivers

Many children have to find their own way home from school. This may be by school bus, riding a cycle or walking. Sometimes children will also be at home without an adult, for example when something unexpected happens or if you are working out on the farm or orchard. It is important that parents and caregivers understand what the law says about children being left on their own.

In New Zealand it is against the law to leave children on their own without taking reasonable steps for their care and supervision. What is reasonable may vary depending on their age, the situation and how long they are left alone. Parents and caregivers must make sure that any child left alone is safe and in no danger (Summary Offences Act).

If a family has worked out some safe family practices beforehand, the child will be able to manage confidently and safely if for some unexpected reason, such as in an emergency, they find themselves at home on their own.

Your child has seen a DVD at school which shows someone around their age getting home safely and being safe while home alone. Ask them what things they remember.

Twelve safe practices are described here.

Talk about each practice with your family, and work out your own safe family rules, or practices.

# 1 Road Safety

## *How does your child get to school?*

- Travel the route to school with your child and notice any places that need special care. These might be pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, narrow footpaths, road works or busy roads. In the country it might be blind corners, metal roads or narrow bridges. Decide on a safe way to handle these.
- Tell your child to stick with the route you have chosen and not to take short cuts.
- Some schools have walking school buses, where trusted adults walk with a group of children. Check if your child's school does.
- Remind your child about safety rules when crossing the road, cycling, walking on the footpath and travelling on a school bus. Be sure to cover waiting until the bus has moved away before checking and crossing the road.
- Ask your school for the book 'Helping Hands - helping to keep children safe on the road. A guide for parents and caregivers'. This is available from your local Police Education Officer at your local Police Station or on [www.police.govt.nz/service/yes](http://www.police.govt.nz/service/yes)

### ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have checked the route to school.
2. We have talked about keeping safe on the road.
3. We have decided on the following road safety rules:

# 2 Friends

## *Who does your child come home with?*

- Decide on other children in your area who can walk or cycle home with your child every day. There is safety in numbers. Discuss these arrangements with their parents. Make sure your child is happy about this. Keep this list of names up to date.
- Decide what will happen if the children are absent from school or have another reason for not being able to walk home with your child.
- If your child wants to visit a friend after school this should be prearranged with you and the other family. Make sure the school knows about this arrangement.

### *Your Family Safety Check*

1. We have talked about who my child can walk or cycle to school with.
2. We have talked about visiting friends.
3. We have decided on the following family safety rules:

# 3 Meeting People

*Can your child handle being approached by a person they may or may not know?*

- On their way home from school, children may be approached by people who are seeking directions, wanting assistance or offering a ride. Children should not accept rides from anyone unless it has been prearranged with you. Your child should also be happy with this arrangement.
- Children should keep a safe distance from vehicles or people they may meet along the way. Encourage them to tell you about anything unusual that happens on the way home. If possible, get them to record registration numbers, colour and make/model of any suspicious vehicles. This should be done carefully so that the driver doesn't notice.

## ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have talked about keeping safe when approached by other people.
2. We have practised recording details about vehicles in a safe way.
3. We have decided on the following family safety rules:

# 4 Getting Help

*Does your child know where he or she can get help on the way home?*

- Work out places your child can call into if help is needed. Make sure that both you and your child know the adults at these places and that your child feels confident and comfortable asking for help. These people might be neighbours or local shopkeepers. Discuss with these adults what will happen if your child does call in. See the information further on about getting help in an emergency.

## ***Our Family Safety Check***

1. We have talked about adults my child can go to for help.
2. We have decided on the following people:

# 5 Getting In

*How will your child get in to the house if you are not at home?*

- If you are out, your doors and windows should all be locked. Don't leave the key in a secret place. Burglars know them all. If there is someone you know living close by you could leave a key there for your child to collect. Many children are responsible for their own keys.
- Encourage your child to look and listen for unusual sounds before going into the house. If in doubt, they should go to a neighbour or call for help on a mobile phone.
- Once inside, your child should lock the door and put the key in an agreed place where it can be easily reached. It is important to be able to get out in the event of fire.

## *Your Family Safety Check*

1. We have talked about our arrangements for keys to the house.
2. We have decided on the following family safety rules:

# 6 Checking In

## *Who will your child check in with?*

- Decide who your child will check in with, by phone, text or email, to let them know they are home safely. Establish a deadline time for this. Discuss what will happen if the deadline is not met. If you are not always available as the check in person, choose another adult who is more readily available. Discuss arrangements with the adult concerned.
- In rural areas you may decide to establish a signal that you and your child can use to communicate between the house and elsewhere on the farm, such as something hung on the clothesline.
- If you have a mobile phone, make sure that your child has the number.

### *Your Family Safety Check*

1. We have talked about how my child will check in.
2. We have decided on the following family safety rules:



# 7 Phone

## *What are the family rules about answering the phone?*

- Get your child to answer the phone by saying 'Hello.' It is not a good idea for them to give their name or phone number because someone might try to trick them. The child should offer to take a message for other family members, telling the caller that the person is "not able to come to the phone right now."

### *Your Family Safety Check*

1. We have talked about safe ways of answering the phone.
2. We have decided on the following family safety rules:

# 8 Computer

## *What are the rules about using the computer?*

- Your child might need to access the computer to do homework or to check in. Make sure that you have established safety rules for computer use.
- Check [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz). You could install a safety filter such as the Hector's World Safety Button TM, which is free from [www.hectorsworld.com](http://www.hectorsworld.com).
- Make sure that your child understands never to give out their name, address or personal details to someone they met online.

### ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have installed a safety filter on the computer.
2. We have talked about safe computer use.
3. We have decided on the following family safety rules:



# 9 Door

## *What happens if someone knocks at the door?*

- Your child should never open the door unless they know the person who is there and feel confident about meeting them. Work out how the child can see who is at the door without having to open it.
- If it is someone they don't know, get them to record some details such as what the person looks like and details about their vehicle if that can be seen. This should be done carefully so that the person at the door doesn't notice.
- If you are expecting someone to collect or deliver anything make sure your child knows about this and knows what to do.
- If there is a neighbour close by you could arrange for them to deal with this. Tell your child about these arrangements.

### ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have checked out a place where my child can see the door without being seen.
2. We have practised how to safely record details about people and vehicles.
3. We have decided on the following family safety rules:

# 10 Back-up

## *Who can your child phone if they can't decide what to do?*

- To help your child feel safe and secure, identify a back-up adult, preferably someone who can see your house. Make sure your child trusts this person and feels happy about asking for help.
- Or your child can contact you by mobile phone if you are somewhere on your property.

### *Your Family Safety Check*

1. We have talked about who my child could trust as a back-up person.
2. We have decided a suitable person is:



# 11 Phone Numbers

*Does your child know the names and phone numbers of all these people who can help them stay safe?*

- Make a list of the names and numbers of all the helpers you have decided on with your child. Include landlines and mobile phone numbers. If your child has a mobile phone, add the helpers' numbers to the contact list. Ensure that the phone list is not visible to someone looking in from outside.

## ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have completed a phone contact list.
2. The people on our list are:

# 12 Emergency



## ***What should your child do in an emergency?***

There may be times when your child is on their own and faced with an emergency, such as someone is badly hurt or in danger, there is a serious risk to life or property, a crime has been committed and the offenders are still there or have just left, or you can hear or see people fighting.

At school your child has been given the following information from Buster. Go over this with them.

***'Buster says when it's an emergency and there are no adults to help you, call 111. An operator will answer the phone and ask you what service you want - Police, Fire or Ambulance. You will then be put through to that service. Stay calm. Speak slowly and clearly. Give your address, phone number, town or district. Answer all questions and follow all instructions. Stay on the line until the operator tells you it's okay to hang up.'***

***It's a good idea to keep your contact details and address information on a piece of paper near your phone.'***

You and your child can get more information on emergencies at [www.buster.org.nz](http://www.buster.org.nz)

### ***Your Family Safety Check***

1. We have discussed what my child should do in the event of an emergency.
2. We have checked out the Buster website.





# Balancing Work and Family

*For some parents and caregivers it is difficult balancing work and family commitments. This may lead to your child having to be at home on their own more than you would like. Some children feel afraid or anxious on their own and little things might worry them. If they are on their own a lot, it can affect their development and how they get on with other people. The following information may be helpful.*

## ***Flexible working hours***

Provided that you have responsibilities of care for any person, you have worked for your employer for at least six months and there is nothing in your employment contract that clashes with your request, you may write to your employer requesting flexible work arrangements.

You need to provide the following information to your employer:

- *Date*
- *Full name*
- *That you are making a request under the Employment Relations Amendment Act 2007 Part 6aa, Flexible Working Arrangements*
- *The change you would like, whether it is permanent or temporary and, if temporary, when it should end*
- *How the flexible work hours will help you provide care*
- *Any changes you think your employer would need to be aware of in your workplace arrangements if your request was approved*

For more information check out the Department of Labour  
[www.dol.govt.nz/worklife](http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife)

***Emotional consequences of children being left on their own***

It is important to remember that children are in the process of developing coping strategies. They rely on support from adults to manage difficult or challenging situations.



