



MENTAL HEALTH MONDAYS



"Tips for Helping Kids Stay Safe at Home Alone"

On Monday, August 24, Julie Noble, [child advocate](#) for [Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida](#) discussed "Tips for Helping Kids Stay Safe at Home Alone".

What is Safe@Home?

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for children through age 19. Staying home alone can be both scary and exciting for parents and children. Lee Health offers a Free 90-minute [Safe@Home virtual class](#) that teaches children indoor safety, outdoor safety, online safety and personal safety.

In the class, children will learn what to do if there's a power outage, if they smell smoke or see fire, if they smell gas or if there's a break-in. They learn how to prevent injuries before they happen. They learn how to prevent choking, allergies, poison dangers, tripping, falling and water hazards. The Safe@Home booklet has a chart to help children learn guidelines on what to do in case of an injury or illness.

In the program, children also learn three threat levels:

1. When a problem is serious and urgent, it is a threat to life, call 9-1-1
2. When a problem serious, but not urgent, children need a parent or backup adult
3. When problems are minor and they can handle them themselves

How to Know if Your Child is Ready to Stay Home Alone

It's important for parents and children to develop a safety signal, a code for children to share with their parent or back up adult that they are in an unsafe situation, such as "I'm ready to be picked up now."

Kids mature at their own pace, so there is no magic age when they are ready to be left home alone. Most children are ready at 10-12 years of age. Those who are ready will be excited to be home alone. Development is more important than age for deciding when a child can stay home alone.

Look for specific behaviors that show the ability to self-care. Skills that may show they are ready include:

1. The child tells you where they are going and when they will return
2. The child completes homework and chores with minimal supervision
3. The child gets ready for school on their own
4. The child knows who to call in case of an emergency

There are also some questions you can ask to feel more at ease when deciding to leave a child home alone:

1. Are they at least 10 years old?
2. Do they want to stay at home alone?
3. Are they independent? Discuss the responsibilities and see if they are confident.
4. Have they had any safety training?
5. Have you worked with them to prepare for when you are not home? Talk to them about how to reach you and who to call for help.

Keeping Kids Safe While at Home

It is important that children know where to turn should they need support. Be sure to program emergency numbers/information into their phone or have them posted and available including:

1. Your work and cell numbers
2. A backup adult who can reach them quickly if needed
3. Poison control (800-222-1222)
4. Your home address

As an added precaution, remind children not to post online that they are home alone, even within their social networks.

RESOURCES

- For information on Child Advocacy classes including Safe@Home and Safe Sitter, visit <https://www.leehealth.org/our-services/child-advocacy/child-advocacy-classes>.
- To reach Julie, email: Julie.Noble@leehealth.org



QUESTIONS FROM VIEWERS

Q: At what age is it OK for your children to babysit or help watch their sibling(s)?

Julie: That depends on maturity level and confidence in your kids. Sibling fighting can be a problem. Recommend grades 4-6 for Safe@Home, 6-9th grade for the Safe Sitter course. These classes will give them the behavior management tips to care for kids.

Lorena Rodriguez, also with Child Advocacy: We recommend for children to begin as a "parent's helper," which is when they care for younger children with a parent at home. The best age group for young babysitters to start watching is ages 3-5.





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About Kids' Minds Matter

The goal of Kids' Minds Matter is to raise awareness about the need for pediatric mental and behavioral health care services and to raise the funds required to make these services available in the region through Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Lee Health. An estimated 46,000 Southwest Florida children are impacted by mental and behavioral health disorders like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psychosis, substance abuse, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As part of the region's strategic solution to the children's mental and behavioral health epidemic in Southwest Florida, Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to fostering partnerships that support existing services, identifying and filling gaps in the continuum of care, and innovating new treatments.

Philanthropic support for Kids' Minds Matter has allowed Lee Health and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida to: implement a tiered model of care that clinically aligns community, inpatient and outpatient care; hire additional psychiatrists, child advocates and other mental health professionals; offer Mental Health First Aid training to local pediatricians, emergency service providers and others who work directly with children; renovate an outpatient center in Fort Myers where a child's needs can be addressed in a therapeutic setting; and launch a first-of-its-kind Pediatric Digital Cognitive Behavioral Health diagnostic and treatment protocols interlaced with Tele-Psychology support to treat anxiety, depression and trauma. Most recently, Kids' Minds Matter introduced mental health care navigators into Lee and Collier County schools who will help families find resources and care to address their child's mental healthcare needs.

The "Mental Health Mondays" segments are a public forum, designed for open discussions that benefit a large audience, and to provide real-time resources and advice from pediatric mental health professionals and advocates. The information shared on this platform is intended for general public consumption and not intended for individual treatment. The views, advice, and resources shared by each guest speaker are solely their own and are not endorsed by Lee Health, Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Kids' Minds Matter. Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to raising awareness and essential funding to enhance pediatric mental & behavioral health programs, services and access to care in Southwest Florida. To learn more about Kids' Minds Matter, visit KidsMindsMatter.com.

