

Department of Family Development
Department Paper

**Teaching Self-Care Skills to Rib Lake Third Graders
in Taylor County**

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Abstract

Providing self-care skills training to all third graders in Taylor County has been a unique cooperative effort between UW-Extension-Taylor County and all three school districts. For the last 12 years, UW-Extension has been the primary teacher of self-care skills in the Rib Lake School district. This partnership has resulted in reaching 506 students with self-care skills training since 1991 in Rib Lake. This paper covers results from the last five years of programs. Pre- and post-tests indicate that students increased their knowledge of specific self-care skills, such as phone skills, personal safety, coping with fear, loneliness and boredom, nutritious snacks and safety in the kitchen. As a result of the program, many of the parents practiced the skills with their children and were more confident that their children were using the skills when home alone.

Situation Statement

In the fall of 1988, the Medford Elementary School guidance counselor came to this faculty member to discuss whether or not there was a need to teach self-care skills in the schools, as was done in the school district she worked in previously. It was not known specifically how many children were in self-care in the Medford School District and at what age. Therefore, a school age child care needs assessment was conducted in grades K-5 in cooperation with the Medford Area School District to identify the specific child care needs of school age children and to examine the need for self-care skills training. (This is the largest school district in the county.)

The results of this survey indicated there was an increase in the number of children home alone or with younger brothers or sisters at third grade, from 3 percent in second grade to 19 percent in third grade and 23 percent in the fourth and fifth grades. Over half of the parents stated they thought children need more information about how to deal with situations that might occur if home alone. Parents felt practical, safety-related information was most important. Fifty percent of the parents stated they preferred written information that they could use with their child. Nearly half (49%) preferred a series of classes for their child taught at school. (Riley and Nordgren, 1989) As a result, self-care classes taught by school personnel and this faculty

member have been part of the third grade guidance curriculum in Medford since 1988, reaching over 2,100 students.

In 1990, this faculty member met with the Gilman elementary principal at his request to discuss starting a self-care skills program in Gilman schools. After a bomb scare at his school where he sent students home, he became aware of how many kids had no one to go home to in emergencies and after school. As a result, this faculty member taught self-care skills in the third and fourth grades for eight years in Gilman, reaching over 550 students.

Assuming similarities with other school districts in the county, this faculty member approached the Rib Lake School district in 1991 to offer a self-care skills program as in the other school districts. As a result, this faculty member has taught a six-session self-care program in the third grade every year since 1991, reaching 506 students. This paper describes results from the program taught in Rib Lake in the last five years. Evaluation results include the last five years because the lesson plans and materials had been slightly changed prior to that time.

Objectives

The purpose of the program is to help children learn proper procedures for keeping safe at home when alone, develop strategies to deal with fear, loneliness and boredom when home alone, choose nutritious snacks and prepare them safely in the kitchen and learn ways to cooperate with brothers and sisters when home alone. In addition, the program encourages parents to work with their children to learn and/or review and reinforce self-care skills.

The objectives for the program are:

1. Third grade students will demonstrate an understanding of self-care skills.
2. Students will practice self-care skills with their parents or an adult at home.
3. Parents and children will feel more confident about the self-care experience.

Methodology

This faculty member taught a six-part self-care skills program in Rib Lake each year. Before the classes started, parents were sent a letter informing them of the classes, asking parents to work with their children on the take home activities and offering to answer any questions they might have about the series. The curriculum and evaluation instruments used were from Operation Safe Kids (Todd, 1986), with adaptations over the years from Kids in Charge (University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1993) and Kids in Control: When You're Home Alone (Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension, 1994). Each lesson was 40 minutes, taught in the students' classrooms. The lessons included:

Personal Safety

Phone Skills

Coping With Fear, Loneliness and Boredom While Home Alone

Nutritious Snacks

Safety in the Kitchen

Getting Along With Others

An important part of the program was having the students share information they learned with their parents and having the parents complete activities with their children. Previous research has indicated the importance of parental involvement in practicing self-care skills with their children (Koblinsky and Todd, 1989). Parts of the "Family Keys" 13-part newsletter series were sent home to parents after each session with activity assignments for parents and children to do at home. A checklist to help parents determine when their children are ready to be home alone was also a part of this set.

Pre- and post-tests were administered to participants to measure knowledge gained. (See appendices a and b) The students' knowledge of self-care skills was measured by six multiple choice questions pertaining to phone skills, personal safety, getting along with brothers/sisters, coping with fear, loneliness and boredom, nutritious snacks and safety in the kitchen. Parents were also surveyed four to six weeks after the program was completed. (See appendix c) Frequency counts were used in evaluation instruments to measure results. This paper reports the results from the last five years, 1998-2002.

Results and Findings

From 1998-2002, the Rib Lake schoolteachers administered the pre-test during the week before the first class of the series to 189 students. They administered the post-test one week after the last class of the series to 187 students. They also sent the parent evaluation and accompanying letter home with the students four to six weeks after the series was completed. Out of 203 Rib Lake families, 85 returned the evaluation survey; a 42% return. On the pre-test and post-test, the return is 93%. (The difference in student and family totals reflects level of absenteeism and students moving in and out of school district during the six-week period, each of the five years.)

Understanding self-care skills

The students, knowledge of self-care skills was measured by six multiple choice questions pertaining to phone skills, personal safety, getting along with brothers/sisters, coping with fear, loneliness and boredom, nutritious snacks and safety in the kitchen. **The results indicated an increase in knowledge with more students answering five out of six questions correctly on the post-test than on the pre-test. On the pre-test, 58 to 92 percent of the students answered five questions correctly. On the post-test, 82 to 95 percent of the five questions were answered correctly.** However, the question about getting along with brothers/sisters was answered correctly by only 34% of the students on the pre-test and only 24% on the post-test. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1 – Self-care concepts

Question about what to do.....		Answered Correctly					Total/ Percent
		2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	
		pre-n=42 post-n=41	pre-n=28 post-n=29	pre-n=34 post-n=35	pre-n=38 post-n=37	pre-n=47 post-n=45	pre-n=189 post-n=187
Brothers and sisters watching TV	pre-test	11	9	12	18	15	65 /34%
	post-test	5	8	11	5	15	
Food in refrigerator	pre-test	39	23	29	36	35	162/86%
	post-test	36	29	33	36	44	178/95%
Boy at door selling magazines	pre-test	23	14	20	24	29	110/58%
	post-test	28	25	32	32	41	158/84%
Answering the phone	pre-test	14	16	25	21	26	102/54%
	post-test	28	26	32	29	38	153/82%
Healthy snack	pre-test	36	27	31	35	45	174/92%
	post-test	35	28	35	36	44	178/95%
Being scared	pre-test	34	23	28	32	37	154/81%
	post-test	32	26	32	33	40	163/87%

Figure 2 – What children are doing at home

Question: To the best of your knowledge, while your child is home alone, he/she can now:	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	Total/ percent
	n=18	n=10	n=18	n=21	n=18	n=85
Use kitchen safety rules when preparing snacks.	14	4	10	12	11	51/60%
Follows rules you have established for when child is home alone.	11	6	11	12	13	53/62%
Feels good about himself/herself and abilities to handle any situations what may occur.	12	4	8	10	8	42/49%
Gets along better with brothers and sisters.	6	3	6	7	4	26/31%
Deals with any fears he or she has about being home alone	11	5	7	9	8	40/47%
Can tell the difference between emergencies and non-emergencies.	14	6	11	12	13	56/66%
Deals with being lonely bored by staying busy with activities	9	2	8	12	8	39/46%

Figure 3 – Key activities completed

Question: Which of the following Key Activities did you do with a family member?	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	Total/ percent
	N=41	n=29	n=35	n=37	n=45	n=187
Completed the List of Family Rules for your family.	27	16	19	18	31	111/59%
Discussed with an adult who to call in different situations.	28	17	24	21	30	120/64%
Made a plan for when you have time alone.	27	14	16	20	27	104/56%
Talked over your feelings about staying home alone with an adult.	23	9	15	17	26	90/48%
Discussed with an adult solutions to problems that may come up when brothers and sisters are home alone.	25	13	18	17	29	102/55%
Practiced with an adult what to do if someone comes to the door when home alone.	23	10	14	18	29	94/50%
Made a nutritious snack.	27	16	16	24	34	117/63%
Completed the food safety inventory checklist or kitchen safety puzzle with an adult.	23	10	19	22	23	97/52%

Figure 4 – Children’s feelings about self-care

When I am home alone I feel....	2002 Pre-test	2001 Pre-test	2000 Pre-test	1999 Pre-test	1998 Pre-test	Total/ Percent	2002 Post-test	2001 Post-test	2000 Post-test	1999 Post-test	1998 Post-test	Total/ Percent
	n=42	n=28	n=34	n=38	n=47	n=189	n=41	n=29	n=35	n=37	n=45	n=187
bored	11	7	14	9	18	59/31%	14	9	19	12	29	83/44%
nervous	9	7	11	8	11	46/24%	13	8	8	9	7	45/24%
worried	13	8	12	13	16	62/33%	14	4	9	9	11	47/25%
lonely	11	8	10	13	13	55/29%	11	7	17	14	12	51/27%
glad	20	8	14	12	13	67/35%	20	12	17	12	17	78/41%
in charge	20	11	17	16	13	77/41%	24	12	17	16	23	92/49%
important	10	5	12	6	9	42/22%	16	5	8	6	11	46/25%
afraid	8	9	11	14	14	56/30%	13	6	12	8	16	55/29%
safe	17	7	12	12	13	61/32%	20	9	9	15	15	68/36%
comfortable	25	10	17	21	24	97/51%	26	12	14	17	17	86/46%

In the evaluation conducted one month after the last session, parents who responded indicated their child uses many of the skills learned in the program. **Sixty percent or more of the parents responding stated their child can tell the difference between emergencies and non-emergencies, follows rules established for when the child is home alone, and uses kitchen safety rules when preparing snacks.** However, less than half of the parents felt their child feels good about being home alone and could handle any situation that arises (49%). Only 47 percent felt their child deals with any fears he or she has about being home alone and 46 percent felt their child deals with being lonely or bored when home alone. Only 31 percent of the parents felt their child gets along better with brothers and sisters when home alone. (See Figure 2)

Practice self-care skills

An important part of the program was having the students share information they learned with their parents. A set of newsletters, "Family Keys," was sent home to parents after each session with activity assignments for parents and children to do together at home. This included a checklist to help parents determine when their children are ready to be home alone.

Post-tests indicated that many of the students practiced skills with their parents. **Fifty percent or more of the students reported completing seven out of eight activities with their parents.** These key activities included completing a list of family rules, discussing with an adult who to call in different situations, making a plan of activities for when home alone, practicing what to do if someone comes to the door when home alone, discussing with an adult solutions to problems that may occur when home alone with brothers or sisters, making a nutritious snack and completing the food safety work sheet with an adult. Only 48% discussed with their child feelings about being home alone. (See Figure 3)

Feeling Confident

Before the program, 33 percent of the students reported feeling worried, 31 percent felt bored, 30 percent felt afraid, 24 percent felt nervous and 29 percent felt lonely when home alone. Thirty-two percent felt safe and 35 percent felt glad they were home by themselves. Less than a quarter (22%) of the students reported feeling important when home alone, yet 51 percent stated they felt comfortable and 41 percent felt like they were in-charge when home alone. (See Figure 4.)

When students' feelings are compared before and after the six-session program, there is some improvement reported in their level of comfort except in a couple of areas. More students felt glad, in charge, important and safe when home alone. Less were worried, but more stated they were bored when home alone. However, it is important to note while the program appeared to lessen some of the student's anxieties, being home alone is not necessarily a comfortable experience for many of these third graders. Fewer of the students (46%) had a feeling of being comfortable when home alone and more (44%) stated they were bored when home alone.

Parents were surveyed one month after the program was completed. Sixty percent of the parents responding to the survey felt their child learned quite a bit or a great deal from the self-care skills program. **Eighty percent of the parents felt their child's confidence about being home alone was increased as a result of the program. Eighty-two percent of the parents felt this program increased their own confidence in their child's ability to be on his or her own.**

Additional Results

On the pre-test, students were asked if their family had rules for them to follow when home alone. Over two-thirds (69%) said "yes." However, very few (23%) had them written down. As a result of the program, 59% of the students stated they completed, with their parents, a list of house rules for their family. This is important because school-age children generally feel more comfortable with set limits, where everyone knows the rules.

The students' reaction to the program was positive. Seventy-five percent of the parents stated that their children responded "very positive" or "somewhat positive" to the six-week program. Sixty-five percent of the parents responding stated they learned "some" or "quite a bit" from the program. This could come from reading the newsletters sent home and doing activities with their children.

Lastly, the parents were asked if they made any changes in how long their child was home alone as a result of the program. Fifty-four percent of the parents responding said no, 21 percent said their child was now home alone for longer periods of time and 13 percent said their child was home alone for shorter periods of time.

Implications and Recommendations

For Parents

Even though the students appeared to have more confidence after the self-care skills program, the student evaluations indicated areas of potential concern. Considering how many third graders may be home alone today, it is important to note how few students report their feeling about the experience as totally positive. After reviewing literature on self-care training, Koblinsky and Todd concluded that teachers of self-care skills should encourage students to discuss their feelings about self-care arrangements with their parents (Koblinsky and Todd, 1989). Parents need to create an atmosphere where children feel they can discuss their fears openly about being home alone.

Certainly, boredom appears to be an issue with the children. Developing a plan of activities with children is a way to combat boredom and keep children constructively occupied. Advanced preparation by parents with their children is important.

The ability of siblings to get along with each other when home alone was also a concern, especially by the parents. If they have less confidence in this area, parents may need to monitor this type of situation closely or seek out more information on how to deal with this issue.

Ultimately, parents need to monitor their self-care arrangements closely for signs of discomfort in their child. It is possible parents may need to make other arrangements for their school-age children that are more satisfying and comfortable to the child until they are older and more mature.

For Educators

At this stage in their children's lives, all parents need information on how to determine if their children are ready to be home alone and how to monitor the situation when children are left home alone. Every family situation is different, thus educating parents on the signs of when children are ready to be home alone should be included as part of self-care training and parent education for all parents during the school age years.

Parents should also be encouraged to continue practicing self-care skills with their children after the classes are completed. According to research by Peterson (1989), learning self-care skills is important, but practicing self-care skills is essential for children to perform these skills when needed. Peterson states,

“...teaching children safety skills from an expert set of safety rules by actually practicing and role-playing safe behavior until it is strongly overlearned and then by re-rehearsing the skills at regularly scheduled intervals is necessary to ensure continued safe behavior.” (Peterson, 1989)

Parents could be encouraged to continue practicing with their children through regular follow-up parent education by using ads on the local radio or articles on self-care topics printed in the local newspaper, distribution of brochure or fact sheet directly to parents one month after the classes through the school or as part of an age-paced newsletter series designed specifically for parents with elementary school-age children.

Conclusion

This program has become a unique cooperative effort between the Rib Lake school district's administration, third grade teachers, guidance counselor, students and their parents and UW-Extension-Taylor County. The background research, appropriate curriculum and teaching methods to teach the self care skills program to the students and development of evaluation tools is provided by this faculty member. The students involve their parents in the program by doing assignments with them. The teachers encourage participation of students by checking off if their homework assignments are completed and by giving incentives to students for bringing back to school evaluation forms completed by their parents at home. Teachers also assist this faculty member by distributing and collecting student pre- and post-tests and parent evaluations and sending them to the UW-Extension office. This faculty member tallies evaluation results and periodically sends a brief report of the results to the school's teachers, counselor and principal involved in the project.

For the past decade, this UW-Extension program has been a part of the third grade guidance curriculum for Rib Lake School. Both students and parents show satisfaction with the program. Students show an increase in learning self-care skills and many parents practice the skills with their children.

This program is unique because it encourages parents to work with their children after the subject matter has been taught to the students. This places the students in a position to share with their parents what they have learned, while allowing parents to become involved by helping their children practice self-care skills at home.

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WHEN YOU ARE HOME ALONE...

When I am home alone, I feel ...

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bored | <input type="checkbox"/> glad | <input type="checkbox"/> afraid | <input type="checkbox"/> lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nervous | <input type="checkbox"/> in charge | <input type="checkbox"/> safe | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> worried | <input type="checkbox"/> important | <input type="checkbox"/> comfortable | |

1. **Does your family have rules you must follow when you are home alone?**

YES NO

Are they written down where you can read them? YES NO

If you have rules about staying alone, write as many as you can remember:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

2. **You and your brother (or sister) are home alone. You are watching TV. You go to the bathroom and when you come back your brother is watching a different show. What is the best thing to do?**

- a. Call your mom or dad and tell them what happened.
- b. Tell your brother you were watching TV and just went to the bathroom.
- c. Find something else to do.
- d. In an angry manner, change the channel back to the one you were watching.

3. **Which food doesn't need to be kept in the refrigerator?**

- a. raisins
- b. lunch meat
- c. cheese
- d. fried chicken

4. A teenage boy comes to your door when you are home alone. You have never seen him before. He wants to come in and show you some magazines that you could buy. What would you do?

- a. Tell him to come back later when your parents are home.
- b. Without opening the door, tell him you are not interested.
- c. Call the police.
- d. Invite him in and look at the magazines.

5. You are home alone and the phone rings. When you pick it up the person asks for your dad. What should you do?

- a. Tell the person your parents are not home.
- b. Answer politely and state that your dad can't come to the phone right now. Ask if you can take a message.
- c. Ask the person to call back later.
- d. Hang up.

6. Which snack would be the most healthy?

- a. potato chips and a glass of milk
- b. a chocolate bar and a glass of soda pop
- c. an apple and a glass of milk
- d. a chocolate bar and a glass of milk

7. You are home alone. You start thinking about monsters and witches and get really scared. What would you do?

- a. Call your parents at work and ask them what to do.
- b. Go next door and tell your neighbor you are scared.
- c. Find somewhere safe to hide until your mom or dad gets home.
- d. Find something fun to do like making up jokes or drawing pictures.

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WHEN I AM HOME ALONE, I FEEL ...

- bored glad afraid
- nervous in charge safe
- worried important comfortable lonely

1. **Which food doesn't need to be kept in the refrigerator?**
 - a. Raisins
 - b. Lunchmeat
 - c. Cheese
 - d. Fried Chicken

2. **You are home alone and the phone rings. When you pick it up the person asks for your dad. What should you do?**
 - a. Tell the person your parents are not home.
 - b. Answer politely and state that your dad can't come to the phone right now. Ask if you can take a message.
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 - b. Tell your brother you were watching TV and just went to the bathroom.
 - c. Find something else to do.
 - d. In an angry manner, change the channel back to the one you were watching.

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- a. Tell him to come back when your parents are home.
- b. Without opening the door, tell him you are not interested.
- c. Call the police.
- d. Invite him in and look at the magazines.

7. Which of the following Key Activities did you do with a family member?

- Completed the list of Family Rules for your family.
- Discussed with an adult who to call in different situations.
- Made a plan for when you have time alone.
- Talked over your feelings about staying home alone with an adult.
- Discussed with an adult solutions to problems that may come up when brothers and sisters are home alone.
- Practiced with an adult what to do if someone comes to the door when home alone.
- Made a nutritious snack.
- Completed the food safety inventory checklist or kitchen safety puzzle with an adult.

8. Name two snacks you have eaten in the past week.

1. _____ 2. _____

9. Place a check mark (✓) by the sentence that describes food safety rules you followed during the past week.

- I washed my hands before preparing food.
- I kept my counter and equipment clean.
- I used food that was clean and fresh.
- I covered leftovers and stored them properly.

3/02

Parent Evaluation - Self-Care Skills

Your Child's Sex: Male Female

1. What has been your **child's** general reaction to the program?

Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Little Response	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive
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2. How much do you feel **you** and **your child** learned from this course?

	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Quite A Bit</u>	<u>A Great Deal</u>
Your Child	1	2	3	4	5
You	1	2	3	4	5

3. As a result of the self-care unit, my third grader and I:
(Please check all that apply)

- developed a list of family rules for our family when my child is home alone.
- discussed who to call in different situations if problems occurred.
- made a plan of activities to do when my child is home alone.
- talked about his/her feelings about being home alone.
- discussed how to get along with brothers and sisters when home alone without adult supervision.
- practiced what to do or say if someone comes to the door when home alone.
- practiced what to do or say if the phone rings when home alone.

4. How has this program affected **your child's** confidence in his or her ability to be on their own?

- greatly decreased his or her confidence
- slightly decreased his or her confidence
- had no effect
- slightly increased his or her confidence
- greatly increased his or her confidence

PLEASE TURN PAGE OVER

Appendix C

5. How has this program affected **your** confidence in your child's ability to be on his/her own?

- greatly decreased my confidence
- slightly decreased my confidence
- had no effect
- slightly increased my confidence
- greatly increased my confidence

6. To the best of your knowledge, while your child is home alone, he/she can now:

- uses kitchen safety rules when preparing snacks
- follows rules you have established for when child is home alone
- feels good about himself/herself and abilities to handle any situations that may occur
- gets along better with brothers and sisters
- deals with any fears he or she has about being home alone
- can tell the difference between emergencies and non-emergencies
- deals with being lonely and bored by staying busy with activities

7. As a result of this program:

- my child is allowed to be home alone without adult supervision for shorter periods of time
- my child is allowed to be home alone without adult supervision for longer periods of time
- I no longer allow my child to be home alone without adult supervision
- I have not made any changes in whether or not my child is home alone without adult supervision

Additional Comments:

THANK YOU! Your answers will help me determine the effectiveness of this program.

pareval02

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