

From Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service of Noble County

## Making the Right Child Care Decisions

Spring is here and the end of school is just around the corner. This is also the time of year that many parents are looking for summer child care and may be wondering if their child is old enough to stay home alone.

Every child is different and there is no specific age when all children are ready for self care. There are however, some helpful guidelines to consider:

- Is your child comfortable with the idea of being alone and have they demonstrated good judgment when they need to make common sense decisions?
- Has your child had training in responding to emergencies and do they follow written and verbal directions?
- Are there younger children in the household who will be in their care? Do you trust you older child to supervise the other children closely and respond to their needs in a mature manner?
- Is your child able to handle everyday tasks like preparing lunch, answering the phone or knowing what to do when someone comes to the door?
- Do you live close to a neighbor or friend who is available in case of emergency, such as a fire or severe thunderstorms?

For those parents who decide that their child is not ready to be home alone and would benefit from a summer child care program, there are some considerations that are unique to the school age child.

If possible, involve the child in determining what type of program you'll choose. Some school age children may enjoy being with a neighbor for the entire summer, while others would prefer the structure of a more traditional child care program or the variety of summer day camps or recreation programs.

Regardless of the setting you choose, make sure you ask the questions about emergency procedures, adult supervision, the daily schedule and opportunities for outdoor play.

Parents of younger children may find themselves in need of child care regardless of the time of year. There are many options available in Indiana and knowing where to start can be confusing.

Indiana is fortunate to have 11 child care resource and referral agencies available to assist families in their search for child care. CCRR agencies offer free child care referrals on-line or by phone and provide a list of questions to ask and information about Paths to QUALITY, Indiana's child care resource and referral agency in your area, go to [childcareindiana.org](http://childcareindiana.org) or call Early Childhood Alliance, the CCRR or Northeast Indiana at 800-423-1498.