

Request special help for children with learning problems.

Support the school staff by showing respect for both the school system and the teacher, at least in the child's presence.

Latchkey Children

The term **latchkey children** is used to describe children in elementary school who are left to care for themselves before or after school without the supervision of an adult. The large numbers of single-parent families and working parents, together with the lack of available child care, have created a stress-provoking situation for many school-age children. Some of these children may have a chronic illness as well.

Inadequate adult supervision after school leaves children at greater risk for injury and delinquent behavior. In some instances, outside activities are curtailed, and relationships with peers may be significantly diminished. Most school-age children feel more lonely, isolated, and fearful when left home alone than children who have someone to care for them ([Ruiz-Casares, Rousseau, Currie, et al, 2012](#)). To cope with their fears and anxieties while alone, these children may devise strategies, such as hiding (in a bathroom, closet, or under a bed), playing the television loudly to drown out noises, and using pets for comfort.

Many communities and persons concerned about the welfare of latchkey children are trying to help these children and their parents deal with this potentially serious problem. Some communities and employers have implemented after-school programs. Other types of programs include those designed to teach self-help skills to children, hotlines to provide telephone check-in and reassurance programs for children, and programs that link latchkey children with reassuring older persons in their community. Nurses should be aware of these community services and encourage parents to teach self-help skills to these children.

Discipline

Many factors influence the amount and manner of discipline and limit setting imposed on school-age children including the parents' psychosocial maturity, their own childrearing experiences during