**Guidelines For Supervision of Children**

**In Ohio, a parent is legally responsible for the care and supervision of a child until the child is 18 (or older if the child is incapacitated or has other special needs). Because each child is unique, it is hard to generalize about when supervision is and is not needed. We feel that good parental judgment includes knowing just how much independence your child is capable of handling safely.**

**There are no laws which specify how much supervision a child requires at a particular age. However, there are numerous laws which make parents responsible for the safety and protection of their child. It is our strong recommendation that parents be cautious about their child’s supervision. If there is not certainty about a child’s ability to function safely without supervision, then the parent should make sure that the child is supervised. Always consider situations that may be encountered by a child who is unsupervised:**

* **The child may not be able to react appropriately when a crisis occurs such as a fire, a burglary, illness, poisoning, burning themselves while cooking, a drowning accident, getting badly cut, breaking a bone, having a serious fall, etc. A good question to ask yourself is whether your child can make split second decisions in an emergency.**
* **Children (especially siblings) tend to quarrel and fight when not supervised, and this can lead to trouble without parental or supervisory intervention.**
* **Children at increasingly younger ages are becoming involved with alcohol and drugs, and this is certainly more likely to happen when they are left unsupervised.**
* **Children who are unsupervised are more likely to leave the house, wander around, and get into trouble, as they are bored and may feel unloved or unwanted.**
* **Children left alone are more likely to leave with a parent who does not have custody, a person they are “not supposed to hang around with”, or kidnapper.**

**No matter what the age of the child, the parent is responsible for planning how the unsupervised child, or the child’s sitter, should react to emergencies.**

**The following recommendations are guidelines and may be too lenient for your child. It is our strong recommendation that it is not appropriate to consider them too strict for any child.**

* **Ages 11 and under – Need direct supervision at all times. Must not be left unsupervised, even for a short time. If a child is unable to quickly find and talk in person to the parent or sitter, the child is unsupervised.**
* **Ages 12 to 15 – Probably do not need a sitter if the parent is gone for a short time (a few hours) occasionally but would need supervision (preferably by an adult) if the parent is gone regularly or for a long period such as working.**
* **Ages 15, 16 and Up – Most do not necessarily need a sitter since they are old enough to be out of school and/or emancipated. However, some children may need supervision, especially if they have special needs. Parents must cautiously use their discretion and good judgment.**

**When your own teenager wants to baby sit, it is important for you as a parent to participate in this decision. Is your child responsible enough to take care of other children? Can your child cope in a crisis? Will you child know what to do or who to call in an emergency? You should also know what kind of people your child will be sitting for and under what circumstances the activity will occur. Be sure your child is not exploited by other parents. Do you and your child know where the parents will be and how they can be reached? Do you know when your child will be home? Do you know how to contact your child? Are you certain your child is not sitting for too many children or for children who are too young or too old for your child’s supervision?**

**When employing a babysitter, consider at least the following questions:**

* **Does the sitter use alcohol or drugs?**
* **Is the sitter alert and capable of paying attention to your child’s needs?**
* **Will the sitter be too preoccupied with his own needs (watching TV, talking on the phone, visiting with friends) to be attentive to your child? Will the sitter be mature and wise enough to handle the discipline of your child without using corporal punishment?**

**Any time you consider leaving your child alone or in someone else’s care, it is a major decision. It is our hope that this information will be of assistance to you and you exercise sound parental judgment.**