

Staying Home Alone A Parent's Guide

The U. S. Census Bureau reports that 7 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are left alone for several hours a week. Age is not the best way to decide when children can be safely left alone. Most experts think that children under 10 are not ready to be left alone on a regular basis. If you are thinking about leaving your child alone there are some things to consider.

Signs of Readiness:

- your child shows a desire and willingness to stay alone
- your child shows signs of responsibility and dependability
- your child talks easily to you about interests and concerns

Things to Consider:

- your child's age
- your child's maturity and level of understanding
- your child's ability to handle urgent situations
- the environment
- the length of time left alone and how often

Children who stay home alone need to know:

- how to react in certain situations—being locked out, being bored, etc.
- house rules—having friends over, cooking, specific responsibilities, etc.
- appropriate use of the telephone—emergency numbers, how to handle emergency situations, contact person's numbers, how to answer phone, etc.
- appropriate safety skills—how to handle a stranger at the door, how to lock and unlock doors and windows, simple first aid, understand that it is never OK to touch a gun, etc.

Try leaving your child alone for short lengths of time, at first. Then your child will feel better about you leaving him or her alone for longer amounts of time. Remind your child of the house rules, emergency contacts, and safety skills because children sometimes forget.

Books for Parents and Kids to Read:

Staying Home Alone: A Girls' Guide to Staying Safe and Having Fun by Dottie Raymer
Crisis Response: A Guide for Children Home Alone by Tim Daley, Dan Billings, and Melissa Jamula
Staying Safe at Home and On-line by Cynthia MacGregor

Sources:

Building strong families. (2002). Preparing your child to stay alone. *Outreach and Extension University of Missouri-Columbia*.
Duncan, S. F. (1994). Children at home alone: A parent's guide. *Alabama Cooperative Extension System*.
Gard, C. (2001). Home alone. *Current Health*, 25(1), 12-13.
Olson, K. A. (2002). Children home alone. *University of Minnesota Extension Service*.