



HOME ALONE

EDUCATE YOURSELF

When is it okay for your child to be home alone? How do you know when the time is right? Review these questions with your child before leaving them on their own.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- 1 Is your child mature enough to be home alone? Is there a responsible adult? Age and maturity are different things. A child who does not know how to respond to a knock at the door, or one who forgets to lock the door, is not ready to be left alone.
- 2 Can your child handle fear, loneliness, and boredom?
- 3 Does your child know emergency procedures i.e. fire, choking, tornado drills. Does your child perform everyday tasks such as fixing a snack, using a phone, and writing messages? These are necessary skills.
- 4 Does your child regularly solve small problems without assistance, knowing that it's okay to ask for help? If your child arrived home to find the front door open, or a window broken, what would be the result?
- 5 Are there siblings who will also be home? Does your child manage conflicts with/among siblings without adult help? The best way to answer this question is to watch your child with siblings. If your child doesn't manage well when your home, most likely the situation will not improve when you're away.
- 6 Is your child comfortable with the idea of staying alone? Ask! If the answer is no, or if they appear hesitant, then it is definitely not a good idea. A child must feel confident about being alone and self-sufficient for the time you are away.
- 7 Is there a first-aid kit available?

THE RIGHT TIME

If you – and your child – are confident that the time is right, try leaving your child for short periods of time to test the results. First, make sure these key elements are in place.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- Have clear expectations and rules about when you are away.
- Make a thorough check of your home for safety risks – access to kitchen appliances (especially gas), alcohol and pills, firearms, and bodies of water. Remove the risks!
- Make certain your child has every key necessary to get into the house, with a plan for what to do if the keys are lost.
- All necessary information should be kept close by – your home address, emergency numbers, your contact information, neighbor's or relatives' phone numbers.

POST EXPERIMENT:

Afterwards, discuss your experiment – did each person feel comfortable? If you still have concerns, contact a trusted professional to help you address your concerns. Try the experiment again when everyone feels more comfortable and confident. **It is not recommended to leave any child under the age of 18 alone overnight.**

AT-HOME SCENARIOS

Before making the decision to leave your child alone, discuss these situations together. Be certain that everyone involved is comfortable and confident that all of these situations could be confronted successfully.

- 1** You're home alone and a stranger calls to speak to Mom or Dad. What do you say? "Mom and Dad are very busy. May I have your number so they can call you when they are free?" **NEVER** tell anyone you are home alone.
- 2** A friend calls and asks you to come to her house, since her parents aren't home either. What should you do? "Mom and I have a rule that I can't go anywhere without her permission. I'll be glad to play with you tomorrow at school." **NEVER** invite a friend to your house without your parents' permission.
Your younger brother is holding a can of some cleaning product. You aren't sure if he swallowed some. What do you do? Call the poison control center. Mom or Dad should have the number by the phone. Follow their instructions exactly. Call your parents so they can come home quickly.
You are playing in the front yard and a stranger drive by slowly and tries to talk to you. What do you do? Go into the house and lock the door. Look through the window. If the car does not leave, call 911 and tell the operator exactly what happened. Remember the color of the car and what the driver looked like. Try to remember the license plate number. **NEVER** talk to a stranger
- 3** A friend comes over (because you already asked permission) and tells you there is something "really cool" to show you. When you see that the "cool" thing is a handgun, what do you do? Ask your friend to put the gun down and together go to another room (take along anyone else who is in the house). There, call your parent to come home immediately. If you can't reach a parent, call 911 and explain the situation. Stay away from the gun and wait for help.
- 4** You smell smoke, or the smoke alarm sounds. What should you do? Get out of the house then call 911. Wait in the front yard or another safe place for the fire trucks. You and your parents should practice a plan of action until you know it very well.
- 5**
- 6**

A CHILD'S SAFETY

Home is the place where a child should feel protected and safe.

But what about those times when a parent can't be there? If there is no affordable after-school program or sitter available, when is it okay for your child to be home alone?

There is no right answer for every child.

There is no magic age when a child suddenly becomes responsible and mature. But there are ways to evaluate your child's capabilities in order to make a more informed decision.



MORE ABOUT US

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana is dedicated to preventing child abuse and neglect. In doing so, we make Indiana a safer, better place for our children.



INFO AND RESOURCES

For more prevention and parenting information, and resources, visit our website or call **1.800.CHILDREN** (1.800.244.5373)



REPORT CHILD ABUSE

To report child abuse and neglect, please call **1.800.800.5556**



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