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# When to Leave Your Kids Home Alone *pg. 1*

Eventually every parent is faced with the question of whether his or her child is old enough to begin staying home alone. When older children are placed in situations of independence that they can handle, it can help them learn responsibility. However, asking too much too soon is dangerous and holds consequences for the child and the parent.

Children left unsupervised or in the care of young siblings are at increased risk for accidental injury and behavioral and academic problems. Because children mature at different rates, there is no single, pre-set age at which children are considered "old enough" to stay home by themselves for short periods. Parents must evaluate their child's individual development and physical capabilities.

The National SAFE KIDSCampaign recommends that children not be left alone before the age of 12. Many other children will not be ready until later than that. Also, experts caution that older siblings are generally not ready for the responsibility of supervising younger children until the age of 15 or older.

## **The following are some questions families should answer before making this important decision:**

- Is my child comfortable, confident and willing to stay home alone?  
Does my child consistently follow my rules and guidelines?
- Has my child demonstrated good independent judgment and problem-solving skills in the past?
- Is my child able to stay calm and not panic when confronted with unexpected events?
- Have I brainstormed with my child about what unexpected situations could possibly come up while he or she is alone, and how to handle them?
- Is my child consistently truthful with me? Does he or she readily come to me with problems and concerns?
- Does my child understand the importance of safety and know basic safety procedures?
- Will my child make decisions to stay safe, even at the risk of seeming rude or overly cautious to other children or adults?

## For More Information

[www.preventchildabusewv.org](http://www.preventchildabusewv.org)

*Information provided by Prevent Child  
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# When to Leave Your Kids Home Alone *pg. 2*

- Does my child have the ability to calmly provide his/her name, address, phone number and directions to our home in an emergency?
- Can my child lock and unlock the doors and windows of our home?
- Can my child tell time?
- Is my child able to work independently on homework?
- Have my child and I established a clearly structured routine for when he or she is home alone, with defined responsibilities and privileges?
- If I have more than one child staying home, have the children demonstrated the ability to get along well and solve conflicts without physical fighting or adult intervention?
- Have my child and I had some “dry runs” to allow him or her to practice self-care skills while I am at home, but purposefully “not available”?
- Is our neighborhood safe?
- Do we have neighbors that my child and I know and trust?

After reviewing this list of questions, you'll have a better idea of how ready your child is to stay home alone. These are only general guidelines. Parents and other caregivers must also consider other factors specific to their individual child and family circumstances in order to make the best decision.

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*Information provided by Prevent Child Abuse Florida*

