



“Is My Child Ready to Stay Home Alone?” Tips

Parents often struggle with this question. Although there is no exact age, here are some questions to help you decide whether your child is ready to stay home alone and tips on easing your child into the situation:

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- **Does my child want to stay home?** Around age 10 or 11 children may try to communicate a desire for more independence. Being home alone for gradually increasing periods of time is one way to move a child into this process.
- **How are my child’s decision-making skills?** Good decision-making skills are a must; you can observe and judge in everyday situations like choosing clothes, or snacks, or crossing a busy street. How they make decisions in everyday life can be indicators of how well they would make a decision in an emergency.
- **Does my child know what to do in an emergency?** Your child should know the phone numbers for your local police, fire and emergency departments. These numbers should also be displayed by the telephone.
- **Does my child demonstrate responsibility?** Types of responsibilities include homework, chores, or caring for a sibling or pet. For example, a child who consistently walks and feeds a dog is showing a sense of responsibility to others.
- **Can my child and I easily and openly communicate?** Your child should be able to tell you what they need and how they feel about different situations. If your child believes that you are worried about paying for the after-school care or a babysitter, they may be less likely to tell you their discomfort with being home alone.
- **Is my neighborhood safe?** No matter how responsible and mature your child is, the area you live in can determine whether or not you leave your child alone. Do you live on a busy or quiet street? Do you live in a secured apartment complex? How might these factors affect the safety of your child?
- **Are there siblings to watch?** Adding younger siblings to the question makes things more complex. There can be absolutely no question about the child’s maturity, responsibility, knowledge of safety precautions and communication skills if you consider entrusting them with the care of younger siblings. Ideally, a child should have some experience as a ‘mothers helper’ or babysitter before being left in charge on a regular basis.

Preparing Your Child:

- **Talk with your child about how they feel about staying home alone.** Having open conversations with your child will help both you and your child better understand each other and increase your comfort levels. Use open-ended, non-judgmental questions, like “I’m starting to think about you coming home after school this year instead of staying for the extended day. What do you think?”
- **Go over important safety procedures.** Review what to do in different situations in the case of an emergency. Check with the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, your local hospital, township police department or the YMCA for safety courses. Practice by playing a game of “what would you do if.....”
- **Make the rules.** Set ground rules and be consistent in their enforcement. Have clear rules around snack time, leaving the house, having company, answering the phone and door, pet care, etc.
- **Be accessible.** Make sure to leave phone numbers where you can be reached; provide phone numbers of neighbors or relatives living close by who can help if you are not reachable.
- **Take a test run.** Start the process by leaving your child home alone for short periods of time; maybe take a quick trip to the grocery store. Call occasionally to check on your child.
- **The Bottom Line:** It’s important that your child feels and really be physically and emotionally safe. Use your judgment; prepare your child, and have a back up plan if you need to reconsider.

Information Provided By: Prevent Child Abuse America – www.preventchildabuse.org, Children, Youth and Family Consortium-
www.cyfc.umn.org

Compliments of:
The Parenting Education Resource Center
Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey
103 Church Street, Suite 210
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
1-800-CHILDREN
(1-800-244-5373)
<http://www.PreventChildAbuseNJ.org>