



HOME ALONE: When is it okay?

Is it legal for your child to stay home alone? Every state has different guidelines for when it is acceptable to leave children home alone, ranging from age 6 to age 14. For example, Virginia has no official rule for what age is acceptable, while Maryland requires the child to be at least 8.

General Guidelines:

7 AND YOUNGER

should not be left alone for any period of time.

8 - 10 YEARS OLD

should be left alone only during daylight hours and for periods of no more than 1½ hours at a time.

11 - 12 YEARS OLD

may be left alone for up to 3 hours, but not at night.

13 - 15 YEARS OLD

may be left alone for extended periods of time.

16 - 18 YEARS OLD

may be left unsupervised overnight depending on child/circumstances.

Each jurisdiction in Northern Virginia provides different age guidelines. In our area, most require that a child be between 8 and 10 years old before a parent even consider leaving them alone. Find your city or county below for specific age suggestions and additional resources:

Alexandria: 703-838-0800

Arlington: 703-228-1500

Fairfax: 703-324-7400

Loudoun: 703-771-5437

Prince William: 703-792-7500

Is your child ready to stay home alone?

Ask your child these questions:

- Are you able to follow important family rules?
- Do you feel comfortable being home alone?
- Do you feel confident that you could handle an emergency situation?

Ask your child these "What if?" questions:

- What would you do if you realized that you misplaced your key?
- What would you do if someone called and asked to speak to your parent?
- What would you do if someone is at the door asking for help/to use phone?
- What would you do if you or your sibling was injured while home alone?
- What would you do if you started to feel worried/scared about being alone?

There is no age that means a child has the skills and maturity level to handle being left alone. Every child is different, maturing and developing life skills at very different ages. Even children in the same home are often ready at different ages! **When you ARE ready, use these tips:**

1. Make sure your child has their address and important telephone numbers memorized.

2. Post a list of emergency contacts in a central part of the house and hide a spare key.

3. Let a trusted neighbor know that your child may be home alone.

4. Check in with your child by phone regularly.

5. Designate a safe house where your child can go if he or she feels scared or unsafe.

6. Teach home safety, such as how to safely use the kitchen, if appropriate

7. Establish a family contract:

Hold a meeting to write down emergency contacts and discuss family rules for things like using phone, cooking, taking care of siblings, watching TV, doing homework, playing outside, having friends over and answering the door.

8. Make a checklist for your home:

- Spare house key is in a safe place
- Front door has a peephole and a deadbolt or chain
- All knives, matches, razors, dangerous cleaning products are safely stored
- All windows, doors are locked
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are present, functioning
- An emergency preparedness kit has been assembled



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