



Is Your Child Ready to Be Home Alone?

A tough question!!! Although paying for child care adds expense to the family budget, providing supervision for school age children is important until they are ready to handle this big responsibility. When the time is right, staying home alone can be a good experience. However, for a child who is not ready, it can be a frightening and potentially dangerous situation.

How Do You Know When Your Child Is Ready?

Age is not a good indicator. There is no legal or magic age when children develop the maturity and good sense they need when home alone.

As a parent, ask yourself these questions:

 **Is my child mature enough to handle a potentially dangerous situation?**

- *What would my child do if there were a fire, a power outage, or a stranger at the door?*

 **Is my child mature enough to handle responsibility?**

- *Can my child be trusted not to lose the house key?*
- *Will my child do chores or homework without supervision?*

 **Does my child want to stay home alone?**

- *Would my child be afraid in this situation?*

 **If brothers and sisters will be home too, will they all get along well together?**

 **Is my child resourceful?**

- *Can my child find something constructive, safe, and helpful to do if he or she is bored?*

 **Is the amount of time my child will be alone reasonable?**

 **If my child needed help quickly, are there people nearby who could help?**

 **Is my child able to talk easily with me about interests and concerns?**



For many children, these abilities begin to appear between 10-12 years of age.

However, if your neighborhood is unsafe, if there are no adults nearby to call in case of an emergency, or if your child must remain home alone for a very long time, it is best to continue to use some form of child care even if your child seems ready to stay home alone.

Your county
extension office



UW
Extension
Cooperative Extension
Taylor County

What Does My Child Need to Know Before Staying Home Alone?

Children who stay home alone need to know:

How to react in situations such as:

- *being locked out or afraid*
- *being bored or lonely*
- *arguments with brothers and sisters*



House rules about:

- *leaving the house*
- *having friends in*
- *cooking and use of kitchen equipment*
- *appropriate snacks & meals*
- *talking with friends on the phone*
- *duties to be completed while home alone*

Children who stay home alone need to have:

Good telephone skills:

- *a list of emergency numbers*
- *knowledge of what to say in an emergency situation*
- *how to respond if someone calls*
- *understanding of appropriate and inappropriate reasons for calling parents or other adults for help*

Good personal safety skills:

- *how to answer the door when alone*
- *how to lock and unlock doors and windows*
- *what to do if approached by a stranger on the way home*
- *what to do if they think someone is in the house when they get home*

Good home safety skills:

- *kitchen safety (use of appliances, knives, and tools)*
- *what to do if they smell smoke or gas or in the event of a fire*
- *what to do during severe storms*
- *basic first aid techniques and how to know when to get help*



Leaving school age children home alone before or after school has its drawbacks. Parents worry more. Kids get bored. There are fewer opportunities to be with friends if children stay home alone, but if alone with peers or brothers and sisters, children are more likely to make wrong decisions and get into trouble.

Children need to feel safe and secure. You can meet this need by providing quality supervision for your school age child. Find a relative, neighbor, friend or child care provider to supervise your child when you can't be there. Don't leave your child home alone until they are ready to assume this big responsibility.

Developed by: Peggy Nordgren, Associate Professor, Family Living Agent

An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA. This document can be provided in an alternative format by calling UW-Extension, Taylor County at 715-748-3327 or 711 for Wisconsin Relay.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/B3885.pdf>