

There is no magic age when your children are ready to stay home alone. All children are different, but no child under the age of 8 should be left alone. To help you decide if your children are ready, consider these questions:



- How does your child feel about staying alone?
- Is your child mentally and physically mature enough?
- What responsibilities are you leaving your child? Can your child handle these alone?
- How long will the child be left alone? The first few times should be quite short. Once you feel sure that the child feels safe and secure, extend the time.
- What are the safety risks for your child in your home? (fire, accidents, burglary, etc.) Have you reduced these risks and taught your child how to deal with them?
- Can your child say “NO” to peer pressure if his friends encourage him to break the rules when you are gone?



PREVENT CHILD ABUSE TEXAS

13740 Research Blvd. #R-4 Austin, TX 78750

512/250-8438 512/250-8733 (fax) pcatx@PreventChildAbuseTexas.org (e-mail)

Whether children are home alone every day after school or only once in a while when parents need to run errands, being home alone can be both safer and more fun with some of the following tips:

- Remove fire hazards and install smoke detectors. Hold fire drills with each child practicing what she is to do and where she is to go.
- Teach your children basic first aid and have a first aid kit in your home.
- Have your children rehearse emergency (911) calls. Make sure they can give their full address and directions.
- Review safety rules: don't play with matches, knives, scissors, etc.
- Make sure they know which appliances they may use alone (oven, microwave) and how to use them safely.
- Establish firm ground rules ("No other children in the house when you are alone.") so that there is no misunderstanding later.
- Tell your children not to tell callers they are alone. Instead they should say, "My mother can't come to the phone now. May I take a message?" If a call seems suspicious they should call you or another adult.
- Warn children never to allow strangers into the house.
- Establish a family "code word", something silly or unusual but that the whole family will remember like "fishbones" or your dog's name. Your children are only to go with someone using this code word.
- Set up an "emergency plan" with a relative, neighbor or friend who would be willing to be called by your child for advice or reassurance in small "emergencies" if you are unavailable by phone.
- Make sure you have a list by your phone of important phone numbers and your house address.
- If your child is home alone everyday after school, set up a routines. Have her call you as soon as she gets home. Provide her with "at-home" projects. Arrange some after school activities such as clubs, scouts, sports. (If you need help with transportation, trade with other parents for week-end driving.)
- If necessary, give your child her own keys with an attractive key chain. Teach her to carry the keys out of sight so she is not identifies as "home alone".
- Encourage your children to discuss how they feel being "home alone". If they are scared, talk to them about their feelings and decide what you can change to help them feel safe.
- Let your children know they have done a good job! You may be pleasantly surprised at how well they resume the responsibility of being "home alone" when they are well prepared.

