

Is it Okay to Leave My Child Home Alone?

Pre-reading

Questions:

- Do you feel okay about leaving your children alone?
- How do you know when a child can be left alone?

Definitions:

- Sensible – acts with good sense, level-headed
- Reliable – dependable, can be counted on
- Secure – to be safe, to be free from fear
- Gradual – increasing something in small amounts



Reading

When to leave a child home alone is a difficult decision. Many parents struggle with the issue of when it is okay to leave a child at home alone. Before this happens in your family, think about these two questions.

First - How mature is my child? Children differ in their ability to follow directions, entertain themselves, and deal sensibly with unexpected situations. Generally speaking, many ten-year-olds are ready to handle being alone for short periods of time--an hour or so. Age alone, however, is not a reliable guide.

Second - How safe is my neighborhood? If a trusted neighbor is willing to check on the child or is available, it can ease your mind and be a sense of security for your child. If a neighbor is not available, you may want to rethink leaving your child alone.

When you decide to take the first step, prepare your child in advance. Set clear rules. Discuss with your child if friends are allowed in the house, or if they can be outside. Set time limits for telephone conversations. Talk about what they can have for meals or snacks.

Make a schedule of activities or things to do. Review important telephone numbers and post them by the telephone. Review safety rules in a way that does not leave your child fearful or overly **anxious**. Rather than stories about terrible things that may happen, teach a few basic rules about what to do if something happens. Talk about what to do when the doorbell rings or when an unknown person calls on the telephone. Discuss what to do if a fire breaks out or if someone is hurt.

When the time comes, help your child feel connected to you. Leave a special message or a surprise to let them know you are thinking about them when you are gone. Begin by leaving for short periods of time. Run an errand or visit a neighbor the first few times you leave your child alone. Gradually increase the length of your absences.

Finally, a couple of reminders.

1. Even though your child is mature enough to be left alone for an hour or two, it does not mean that they are ready to be left in charge of a younger child.

2. Remember that no child under the age of 15 should be left alone for long periods of time, particularly at night.

Understanding

1. How can you help your child feel connected to you when you are gone? _____

2. What are the two questions you should ask yourself before deciding if it is okay to leave your child home alone? _____

3. What does **mature** mean in the story? _____

4. Where should you post the important telephone numbers? _____

5. What does the word **anxious** mean? _____

6. What two things should you review with your child before you leave her home alone? _____

7. What are some of the things you should discuss with your child before leaving her home alone? _____

Writing

Option A: Tell why you think your child is or is not ready to be left home alone.

Option B: In your own words, summarize what you learned about deciding if your child can be left home alone.
