

Children First: Safe and Secure




Section III—Parent's Corner

Home Alone Guidelines for Parents

Before deciding to allow a child to stay "home alone," parents must take into account the child's age, behavior, and judgment. There is no set age when all children are ready to stay by themselves and there is no Texas statute that defines a specific age at which a child may be left alone without adult supervision.

No child should be placed in a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities. Important factors to consider include the emotional maturity and capability of the child to respond to a crisis. Other factors are the accessibility to other responsible adults the child can contact if needed and the overall safety of the child's surroundings. Whether children are home alone every day after school or while a parent runs an errand, these safety tips will help make the experience safer.

- ◆ I have made sure that my child feels safe and secure staying home alone.
 - ◆ I have rehearsed with my children how to call 911.
 - ◆ Emergency phone numbers are posted by the telephone.
 - ◆ Our home address is posted by the telephone (when there is an emergency, children may find it difficult to recall their address)
 - ◆ A basic first aid kit is available and my child is knowledgeable in basic first aid.
 - ◆ Fire hazards have been removed.
 - ◆ Smoke detectors are installed and working.
 - ◆ Fire drills have been held with each child.
 - ◆ I have told my children that they are not to tell callers they are home alone. They know to tell callers that their parent is busy and will offer to take a message. If you have an answering machine, use it to screen the calls for the children and tell them which calls to pick up.
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- ◆ I have set up an emergency plan with a neighbor or relative who will be on hand if an emergency arises.
 - ◆ My child has been warned never to allow strangers in the house.
 - ◆ I have explained to my child who is allowed in the house when I am not at home. They know beforehand to expect someone they know to come to the house. If someone they know comes to the house unexpectedly, they will call me first before allowing that person in.
 - ◆ My children know not to go inside the house if something looks different. They will go to neighbors and call me.
 - ◆ I have instructed my children to lock the doors when they get inside.
 - ◆ I have reviewed safety rules with my children, including not using the stove, oven, scissors, or knives.
 - ◆ I have explained to my children it is important to keep their house key out of sight.
 - ◆ My children understand and use Internet safety rules.