



## Child Care Answers "Parents in the Know"

### Is my child able to stay home alone?

Fall brings many changes and adjustments. One of those is the big question of when is it okay for your child to be home alone.

There is not a one size fits all type of answer. There is no magical age when children suddenly become responsible and mature. This is a matter that occurs at different stages and can change on a regular basis as children / young adults learn more about themselves and the world around them.

There are some ways to evaluate if your child is ready for this very important step. Before you make the decision to leave your child alone, be certain that everyone involved is comfortable and confident with all the answers to the following questions.

- ◆ **Is the child mature enough to be home alone?**  
Age in years and age in maturity can be very different.
- ◆ **Is there a responsible adult nearby if needed for the child to call for help?** This can be a relative or a neighbor.
- ◆ **Can the child handle fear, loneliness and boredom?**
- ◆ **Does the child know emergency procedures?**  
Review fire escape routes. Have a fully equipped first aid kit in easy reach. Have the child take first aid classes.
- ◆ **Is the child able to solve small problems without assistance but knowing when it is okay to ask for help?**
- ◆ **Can the child perform everyday tasks such as fixing a snack, knowing how to use the phone and taking messages?**
- ◆ **If you have a computer, have set rules about the use when adults are not around.**

- ◆ **Is the child comfortable with the idea of staying alone?** If the answer is no, then it is definitely not a good idea. Children must feel confident about being alone and self sufficient for short periods of time.

Once everyone feels confident with the new step, it is important to have rules and guidelines established from the beginning.

- ◆ Create a contract of basic agreements of what is expected from both sides.
- ◆ Make a thorough check of the home for safety risks. When in doubt, remove.
- ◆ Make certain the rules concerning house keys are established and known.
- ◆ Have all necessary contact information posted by the phones.

Communication and trust are vital for this step and will take time. When in doubt, contact a trusted 3rd party to help address your concerns.

*October and November 2008*

*Issue 2*



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