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7 Safety Rules for Kids at Home Alone

If your child is ready to stay home alone, here are some rules to keep your child safe.



Learning Benefits

Hover over each Learning Benefit below for a detailed explanation.

Logic and Reasoning

Problem Solving

Following Directions

Responsibility

When is your child old enough to stay home alone after school? It totally depends. Only you can properly assess your child's maturity, judgment, and comfort level. Your city or state may have laws governing the age at which kids can legally be left alone (often it's 11 and up), so be sure to check into that before you make a decision.

Ask your child how he feels about staying home alone. If he seems worried or afraid, he may not be ready. But if he's keen to try, this experience can foster his sense of independence. If you determine that he is responsible enough to care for himself alone after school, brief him on these rules:

- 1. Have an emergency plan.** Inspect your home thoroughly for any safety risks. Make sure that all of the smoke detectors are functioning properly. Even if you believe it to be common sense, review the sound of the alarm — and what to do if it goes off — with your child. She should get out of the house immediately and then call 911 from a neighbor's house. Review the emergency exits by drawing a map that outlines the best pathways to safety from each room in the house. Post relevant phone numbers (911, a close neighbor, your cell and work numbers) prominently.
- 2. Always check in.** Make it a rule that your child calls a parent (or other adult that you designate), or leaves you a message, as soon as he gets home. This can be the first step in a daily routine that includes homework, a snack, and some downtime.
- 3. Make the phone (almost) off-limits.** Your child shouldn't answer the phone for just anyone, so set up guidelines. If you have a land line with caller ID, tell her not to answer the phone if she doesn't recognize the name or number. If you don't have caller ID, tell him that she should let every call go to voice mail. If you child is old enough to have her own cell phone, use the same guidelines.
- 4. Don't leave the house.** Your child should not leave the house unattended unless he's cleared it with you first or there is an emergency such as a fire. Make sure that he is aware of the risks of leaving home.
- 5. Take the same way home.** Have her take the same route to and from school every day. If your child walks, review each street that she uses. If she takes a school bus, make sure that she takes it every day, even if she is offered a ride from a friend. Knowing her route allows you to predict how long it will take her to arrive home, and to trace her steps if there is ever a problem.
- 6. Keep him busy.** Although he needs some downtime to rest and rejuvenate, your child will be less likely to get into

trouble if he's occupied with homework, [music practice](#), and chores.

7. **Practice first aid.** Keep a first aid kit handy and review it with your child. Help her distinguish between a true emergency and a minor one that she can handle herself.

Topics

[Safety](#), [After School](#).

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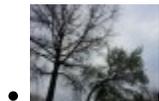


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