

Is My Child Ready to Stay Home Alone?



This is not an easy question to answer and must be considered carefully. Age alone is not a very good indicator of a child's maturity level. Every child is different, maturing and developing life skills at very different ages. Some very mature 10-year-olds may be ready for self care, while some 15-year-olds may not be ready due to emotional problems or behavioral issues.

Virginia does not have a law that specifies when a child is old enough to stay home alone. However, some localities do. So, check with your locality to see if there is an ordinance stating the age when a child may be left without supervision.

Here are some suggestions to increase the safety of your older child and ease your mind while he or she is home alone:

- ✓ Talk with your child openly about how they feel about staying home alone. This will help both you and your child better understand each other and increase your comfort levels.
- ✓ Agree on ground rules for those times when you are not home. For example, rules for cooking, leaving the house, having friends over, etc.

- ✓ Assign your children tasks to accomplish while you're gone. Try to keep them busy!
- ✓ Be sure to have telephone numbers posted where you can be reached. Also, make sure you list phone numbers for fire and police, neighbors, and relatives.
- ✓ If your children arrive home to an empty house, be sure to call and check in with them.
- ✓ It is important to note that a child who can take care of him/herself may not be ready to care for younger children.
- ✓ Take a test run. Start by leaving your child home alone for short periods of time; maybe take a quick trip to the grocery store. Call occasionally to check on your child.
- ✓ Remember, with the proper guidelines, being home for limited periods of time can increase independence and responsibility in your child!

Sources: Prevent Child Abuse America, Virginia Department of Social Services, SCAN of Northern Virginia, Children, Youth and Family Consortium.



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)