

Home Alone: Is Your Child Ready?

When is my child old enough to stay home alone? How young is too young? What is an appropriate age to let my child babysit siblings or neighbor children? Because kids mature at different ages, knowing when your child is old enough to stay home alone can be difficult. If you are thinking about leaving your child home alone for the first time, there are several things to consider. The following supervision guidelines provide a starting point in making this decision.

Infant/Children ages 0-4

North Dakota Supervision Guidelines state all children under the age of four, be in view of their caregiver at all times while outside of the home. Inside the home, the caregiver should be available and able to respond to the children to provide immediate care and protection from harm. In addition, children of this age should not be left in vehicles unless they are in proper restraints (unable to put the vehicle in gear) and in direct view of the caregiver at all times.

Children 8 years and younger

Should be supervised at all times with a caregiver available.

An 8-year-old should not be left in charge of other children.

Children who are 9 years old

A child of this age should **NOT** be:

- Left unsupervised for periods greater than two hours during the daytime
- Unsupervised during sleeping hours
- Responsible for younger children

Children who are 10-11 years old

A child at this age may be left alone for longer periods of time. However, caution is advised in leaving a child unsupervised during sleeping hours. Children this age should not be responsible for younger children.

Children 12 years and older

- May be permitted to act as baby-sitters but it is recommended they successfully complete an approved childcare training course.
- Caution is advised on the number of children left in care, length of time for caregiving responsibility, factors regarding special needs of children left in care and resources available to the child providing care.

Teens

Children under the age of 15 should be attended overnight. Caution should be taken in leaving 15-17 year olds alone overnight. Extended absences of caregivers (such as over a weekend) are not recommended.

Children staying home alone can...

- Get home from school safely
- Use the keys to get in the door & lock it once safely inside
- Say their full name, phone number & address in case of emergency
- Use the phone
- Know how & when to call 911
- Call a neighbor to ask for help if needed
- Get a snack or safely make a cold snack
- Do some homework on their own
- Follow simple rules
- Know how to do simple first-aid (e.g., put on a Band-Aid or run cold water on a burn)
- Understand enough about time to know when you will be home

