

How Old is Old Enough to Leave a Child Home Alone?

In the state of California there is no legal age stipulated however there are some guidelines to help you decide if your child is ready to be left alone. The following guidelines are from the National Network for Child Care.



There is no single answer to “how old is old enough”. No magical age or single indicator that ensures a child is ready to stay at home alone (or with younger siblings). Some states have made laws that specify an age (e.g. 10 years old) below which it is illegal to leave children alone. Other states (such as California) do not set a specific age, but rather, consider the maturity level of the child. The following are questions to ask yourself about how fit your child is to remain alone (or with siblings).

We suggest that as a caretaker, you consider only a child over 10 years old to be ready for consideration.

- Yes or No The child can identify two escape routes from the house in case of fire
- Yes or No The child can handle telephone calls correctly.
- Yes or No The child has demonstrated correct procedures for handling strangers at the door.
- Yes or No The child knows how to reach parents or other responsible adults by phone.
- Yes or No The child can name two adults to contact in case of an emergency.
- Yes or No The child will tell parents or child care providers about daily events without prompting.
- Yes or No The child can locate a safe place to seek shelter during a storm.
- Yes or No The child can name five household rules and identify which ones were followed the previous weeks.

Self-Care Readiness Checklist:

- Yes or No The child can give his or her address and directions to home.
- Yes or No The child can repeat and dial the home phone number.
- Yes or No The child can explain how to handle first aid for cuts and scrapes, bumps, nosebleeds, poisoning bites, choking, and eye injuries.
- Yes or No The child knows where to locate first aid supplies kept in the house.
- Yes or No The child can give an example of a time when they had to figure out and decide what the right thing to do without adult input was.
- Yes or No The child has indicated an interest or willingness to stay on his or her own.
- Yes or No If other children will be present, the children are willing to stay alone with each other and fighting is at a tolerable level.



Sierra-Sacramento Regional Child Abuse Prevention Councils' Coalition

A working coalition of child abuse prevention councils from 15 counties.

www.sierrasaccoalition.org

The child.....

Completes household chores

Hardly ever Sometimes Often Most of the time Always

Completes homework

Hardly ever Sometimes Often Most of the time Always

Arrives at school on time

Hardly ever Sometimes Often Most of the time Always

Arrives home on time.

Hardly ever Sometimes Often Most of the time Always

Lets parent/provider know where he or she is going before leaving.

Hardly ever Sometimes Often Most of the time Always

Once you have completed the checklist, examine the answers. If you answered “no” or “less than often” to any questions, it may signal a need for information, training in self-care skills, or an alternative care situation if a parent or child care provider is to be away.

After the child has gained the skills and knowledge needed to stay alone, plan a trial period of self-care in order to see how the child adjusts to the situation. Initially, you may want to present it as a temporary arrangement so that the child knows he or she can choose not to continue if it is uncomfortable staying alone. This will also allow parents to end the arrangement more easily if they feel the child is unable to handle the situation.

As a parent you have knowledge about how your child handles responsibility, follows direction, uses good judgment, and feels about being alone. The provided checklist may be a helpful tool for parents to use to determine readiness. This list should be used only as a guide, **NOT** as the deciding factor.



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