



HOME ALONE: When is it okay?

Agencies across Northern Virginia* recently developed a set of “supervision guidelines” for parents to consider before leaving a child alone. These are not laws, but are suggested ages for parents to use as a guideline:

Is my child ready? Ask them:

- What are our family rules?
- Do you feel comfortable being home alone?
- Could you handle an emergency situation? How?
- What would you do if you lost your key?
- How will you answer the phone?
What if a caller asks to speak to an adult?
- What would you do if someone comes to the door?
- What would you do if you got hurt, sick, or upset?
- What would do you if you feel worried or scared?

Is my family ready? Take these steps:

- 1. Write family rules together:** Go over emergency contacts and discuss rules for phone and screen use, cooking, doing homework, playing outside, having friends over and answering the door.
- 2. Help your child memorize their address** and important telephone numbers.
- 3. Post a list of emergency contacts.** Make sure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working.
- 4. Hide a spare key in a safe place.** Make sure door and window locks work and children know how to use them.
- 5. Let a trusted neighbor know** that your child may be home alone. Designate a safe place where your child can go if he or she feels scared or unsafe.
- 6. Check in with your child** by phone/text regularly.
- 7. Teach home safety.** Safely store any dangerous items in your home, such as knives, matches, razors, guns, cleaning products and medications.

Supervision Guidelines:

8 years (and younger)

should always be in the care of a responsible person. Children this age should not be left unsupervised anywhere (homes, cars, playgrounds, yards, etc.).

9-10 years old

may be ready to be left unsupervised up to 1.5 hours during daylight/early evening.

11-12 years old

may be ready to be left unsupervised up to 3 hours during daylight/early evening.

13-15 years old

may be ready to be left unsupervised more than 3 hours but not overnight.

16 years (and older)

may be ready to be left unsupervised overnight for 1-2 days, with a plan in place.

Parents are ultimately responsible for their children. There is no “official” age that means a child has the skills and maturity level to be left alone. Consider specific circumstances and the child. Every child is different, maturing and developing life skills at very different ages. Even children in the same home are often ready at different ages!