

If your child is not ready to be home alone

It's okay to look for another safe place for him or her to stay when you go out, until your child is ready.

Here are some places you can look for help:

- Family, friends or neighbors you can trust
- Other parents who also need child care and can take turns with you
- A babysitter you can share with other parents
- After-school care at your child's school
- After-school programs at your place of worship, YWCA, YMCA or the Boys and Girls Club in your area
- Child care centers with after-school programs
- Qualified people in your area who care for children after school in their home
- Dial 2-1-1 or visit pa211sw.org for possible resources

If you need help paying for child care:

- Ask if your employer has workplace incentives – like Family Savings Account programs or inexpensive childcare options
- See if a local child care center has scholarships or subsidies for after-school care
- Call Child Care Information Services of Allegheny County at 412-261-2273 to see if you qualify for subsidized child care

For a listing of additional resources, visit www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/homealone.aspx.

If you want to talk with someone about your situation, call the Parenting WARMLINE at Family Resources at 412-641-4546 or 1-877-WARMLYN to speak to a trained person who knows what you are going through – another parent or child-care giver – who will listen and help you with simple questions or even complex situations.



Leaving a child at home alone before they are ready can be dangerous and result in a tragedy. Children die every year across the country from fires that have broken out. Some of these fires are caused by children cooking or playing with matches.

Never leave your infant, toddler or preschooler home alone.

This brochure is intended to assist those making the decision to leave a single child at home. Taking care of younger siblings requires additional responsibilities. Before leaving an older child to care for younger siblings, we recommend consulting a pediatrician or other qualified person about your situation.

HOME ALONE:

Is your child ready? Will your child be safe?



Many experts suggest never leaving a child younger than 12 home alone, but age is only one factor to consider. Children mature at different rates and react to situations differently. Even if you are only running to the corner store, does your child have the skills and maturity to be safe?

This brochure helps you to decide if your child is ready.



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Is your child ready?



Is your child physically and mentally able to care for him or herself?



Does your child obey rules and make good decisions?



How does your child respond to unfamiliar or stressful situations?



Does your child feel comfortable or fearful about being home alone?

Children staying home alone **MUST** be able to:

- Get home from school safely
- Use the key to get in the door and lock it when they are inside
- Say their name, phone number and address in case of an emergency
- Use the phone – if no landline is in the house, a cell phone must be available
- Call a neighbor and ask for help if needed
- Know how and when to call 911
- Follow simple house rules
- Know how to do simple first aid
- Safely get or make a cold snack
- Do some homework or chores on their own

If your child is ready to be home alone

After reviewing the previous section, if you feel that your child is ready to be home alone, here are some safety tips to consider.

Prepare your child for the responsibility of being home alone:

- Make a few simple rules about what you expect
- List the rules on paper and post
- Write important phone numbers on a list so your child knows what to do:

Your phone number

The numbers of trusted neighbors or others who can help

911 – In an emergency your child might not remember it

- Have a cell phone available if there is no landline
- Talk about what is an emergency and what to do
- Practice when to call 911 and what to say
- Outline what to do in case of a fire

Be clear about the “DO NOT” rules for safety, including:

- Do NOT open the door to anyone
- Do NOT tell anyone that you are home alone
- Do NOT touch matches or a lighter – for any reason
- Do NOT use the stove or toaster oven

Make sure that your child feels safe when home alone:

Many children have mixed feelings about staying home alone. You should determine if your child is worried or anxious about this. Many children feel more comfortable if they practice some things.

Practice what your child should do if:

- They cannot reach you by phone
- There is a knock at the door
- The phone rings
- A friend wants to come over
- The popcorn in the microwave catches fire
- They lose their keys

Suggested Guidelines:

- As a first step, it is always a good idea to leave for a short time, for 15 – 30 minutes, to let your child get used to being alone.
- Always let your child know when you will be home. If you have a change in plans, call your child. Children get worried when things don't happen in the way they expect.
- Even if your child demonstrates knowledge of all this information, it is wise to have it written out in an easily accessible place. Also – **even if you decide your child can stay home alone, taking care of younger children may be too much for them.** If you are not sure, talk with someone you respect such as a relative, neighbor, teacher, doctor or clergy.
- Put phone numbers and rules where your child can easily find them.
- Talk to your child and see if there is anything else you can do to help them feel comfortable and safe.
- When you come home, spend some time with your child and praise him/her for following the rules.

