



Did You Know...?

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About Home Alone

Parents Reaching Out connects with families, schools and communities in New Mexico. We offer information from many reliable sources. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their PEN Notes publications in this information series.

It is estimated that over 40% of children are left home alone at some time while parents are working, running errands, or at some social engagement. Thousands of children care for themselves before school or arrive home from school to an empty house. And there is no magical age at which children develop the maturity or good sense to stay alone. Are your children ready for this responsibility?

Children who stay alone need to know

How to react to situations such as

- Being afraid
- Being bored
- Being lonely
- Being locked out
- Arguments with brothers and sisters

House rules about parents leaving the house

- Having friends in
- Cooking and use of any kitchen equipment
- Appropriate snacks & meals
- Talking with friends on the phone
- Duties to be completed while home alone



Children who stay alone need to have:

Good telephone skills

- A list of emergency numbers, name of household & address by the phone
- Knowledge of what to say in an emergency situation
- How to respond if someone calls
- Understanding of appropriate and inappropriate reasons for calling parents or other adults for help

Good personal safety skills

- How to answer the door when alone
- How to lock and unlock doors/windows
- What to do if approached by a stranger on the way home
- What to do if they think someone is in the house when they get home
- What to do if someone touches them inappropriately

Children who stay alone need to have:

Good home safety skills:

- Kitchen safety (use of appliances, knives and tools)
- What to do if they smell smoke or gas
- What to do in the event of a fire
- What to do during severe storms
- Basic first aid techniques and how to know when to get help

A child who is prepared for the experience of staying alone may enjoy the independence and be able to accept the responsibility of being home alone. With the right rules and basic safety guidelines set, the experience can build self-esteem, confidence and competence. Do not frighten children when teaching them personal safety and caution; don't give them too much information at once, so they will absorb all the material.

Other factors to consider when thinking of self-care are:

- The neighborhood in which you live
- The availability of adults nearby
- How long child will be alone



Signs to look for in your child to indicate that he might be ready to stay alone:

1. Willingness to stay alone
2. Accept responsibility and make decisions independently
3. Get ready for school on time
4. Problem solving
5. Complete home work and house hold chores with little supervision
6. Remember to tell you where they are going and when they will return

These abilities begin to appear around twelve years of age but remember good parent-child communication is important so that any fears or problems can be quickly discussed or dealt with. Children nine years of age and older can be left alone for short periods of time and never overnight.

Children should be at least twelve years of age before they are left to supervise younger children. For specific developmental guidelines contact your Department of Family Services.

Sources: "Preparing Children to Stay Alone" North Central Regional Extension Publication # 248 American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) Website Farmer, Maudester "Home Alone, Children Gain Self Esteem, Confidence" Ohio State University

"Did You Know...?" fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department under a grant from the US Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the Federal Government.