



Leaving children at home alone

(NSPCC "Home Alone" Guidance 2011)

As a parent, caring for your child is your number one priority. But sometimes you might have to spend time away from your child, whether it's to go to work, go out for the evening or just to nip out to the shops.

There's no legally set age at which it's OK to leave your child at home alone. It depends on whether yours is mature enough to cope in an emergency and feels happy about being left alone. Children mature at different ages and every child is an individual.

Your children rely on you to protect them and you are responsible for making sure that they are happy and well looked after in your absence.

Is it ever safe to leave your young child alone? What are the dangers and risk of leaving yours at home alone?

There are many important things to consider before you decide to leave a child alone. These include:

- The age of the child
- The child's level of maturity and understanding
- The place where the child will be left
- How long, and how often, the child will be left alone
- Whether or not there are any other children with the child.

You are the best judge of your child's level of maturity and responsibility.

Some current guidance to consider:

Never leave your baby or young child home alone, not even for a few minutes, regardless of whether they are awake or asleep.

The risks are too dangerous – what if you were delayed or your baby was sick?

If your child is under 12, they may not be mature enough to cope with an emergency. They should not be left alone for more than a very short time. Many young children play outdoors with other children without supervision; most people would agree that this is an important part of growing up. To leave children outdoors for a considerable length of time though or to allow them to wander off without knowing where they are going would be unacceptable.

If your child is under 16, they shouldn't be left alone overnight.

When leaving older children, make sure that they are happy about the arrangements and that they know how to contact the emergency services. Most parents would think it's OK to leave a 16-year-old alone overnight. But to leave them for a week would be unacceptable. Your child might be mature enough to be left alone, but consider; are the friends that they are bringing into your home when you are not there, mature enough ?

Did you know?

There's no legal age limit for leaving a child on their own, but it's an offence to do so if it places them at risk. Parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health".

What is neglect?

If you fail to meet your child's basic needs, such as food and warm clothing, or constantly leave your child alone, this is known as neglect. Neglect is as serious as other forms of child abuse because the effects can be just as damaging and long-lasting.

For further information

You can download the NSPCC "Home Alone" information leaflet at:
<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Or for advice on leaving your child home alone or what to do if you are worried about a child being left home alone, contact:

British Forces Social Work Service, Central Referrals on; (Germany)
+49(0)800 724 3176