



## Home alone: When can you safely leave children by themselves?

Each year as summer approaches we get questions from parents concerned about supervision of children who will be out of school for summer vacation.

There is no federal or Washington state law regarding the age at which children may stay home alone or baby-sit. It is recommended that parents take into consideration the skills and maturity of the child. Some children mature sooner than other children. When parents decide that a child is able to stay home alone or baby-sit, they should begin with short periods of time and slowly lengthen the time as they become more confident in the child's competence. Parents should be sure the baby-sitter has access to appropriate emergency information and has the telephone number of a responsible adult.

Most authorities agree that leaving a 12-year-old alone at home for an hour or two is acceptable, but someone this age should not be responsible for other children. The decision to leave a child home alone is a very personal decision that needs to be made based on parents' feelings and experience with their own child. Washington State does not have any laws or rules that say at what age a child can be left home alone. In general, children under the age of 10 should not be left on their own, and babies and younger children should not be left alone even for a few minutes.

Here are some questions to ask yourself before you leave your child home alone.

- Does your child feel frightened or apprehensive about staying home alone?
- Does your child follow your instructions and your rules?
- Can you count on your child to tell you the truth?
- Can your child be counted on to stay clear-headed in an unexpected or emergency situation?
- Can your child calmly dial 911, give their full name (and yours), street address and phone number, and explain the situation?

And always remember: If ever you feel children are at risk of imminent harm and you would like to report an allegation of Child Abuse/Neglect call (800) 562-5624.