

"How To" CHECKLISTS

Guidelines for Leaving Your Child Home Alone

There comes a time when parents are confronted with the decision whether to leave their child home alone. When that time comes, the following guidelines can be used to help make a smart decision.

- **Age and maturity of child.** There are very few states that have a minimum age requirement for a child to stay home alone. It is up to the parent(s) to determine what age they feel is appropriate for their child to be home without adult supervision. Some believe a child of 10 is capable of being home alone for a short period of time.

When deciding if your child is ready, the first rule of thumb is to assess the maturity level of your child before allowing them to stay home alone.

- Does your child demonstrate responsible behavior in and out of the home?
- Are they capable of making sound decisions?
- Can they care for themselves physically and mentally?
- Are they ready for more freedom and responsibility?
- Does your child make good decisions in and out of the home?
- Does your child follow rules and do what is expected of them?
- Does your child have any fears or anxiety about being home alone?

- **Rules and expectations:** Clearly lay out your rules and expectations so your child knows, in no uncertain terms, what is expected of him/her while you are out. Some examples:

- No friends or people of the opposite sex.
- No cooking or eating excessive junk food.
- No answering the door.
- Set a time limit on TV and computer use.
- If staying with siblings no fighting, oldest one in charge. Your child should only be responsible for a sibling if they are capable of caring for a younger child.

- **Emergency numbers** - Make sure your child is given the phone numbers to neighbors, friends, relatives and 911.

- **Prep them to stay home.** Discuss what it means to stay home alone. Explain how to plan for an emergency. Discuss any concerns or fears they might have about being home. Role play scenarios so they feel prepared for any and all situations they could potentially face.
- **Slowly build up to leaving them alone.** Practice a few times by leaving for a very short amount of time to get them ready. Never stay out too long.
- **Check in periodically** to ensure they are safe.
- **Empower your child.** If they do a good job, reward them with praise and a chance to gain more freedom.

