

**Is Your Child
Ready to
Stay Home
Alone?**

An Assessment Guide for Parents

Each stage in a child's development brings with it new challenges. The decision to allow your child to be home alone can be a positive step in your child's growth and development provided there is sufficient planning and preparation.

Since all children are individuals there is no set age at which every child is ready or able to be a "latchkey kid." To help you determine when your youngster is ready to accept the responsibility of self care, please ask yourself the following questions.

For best results this questionnaire should be shared with at least one other individual who has first-hand knowledge of this child (spouse, grandparent, youth activities' leader, etc.)

Answer "yes" or "no" to the following 15 questions, regarding your child's behavior most of the time.

YES NO

- 1. Does your child think about new situations before acting? (In contrast to reacting to new situations as a method of checking out appropriate behaviors.)
- 2. Is your child able to say out loud what he/she wants or needs?
- 3. Does your child follow rules of parents, school teachers and others in authority?
- 4. Does your child almost always carry out assigned household tasks without nagging?
- 5. Is your child able to oppose his peers when they try to get him to do something wrong?
- 6. Is your child able to apply rules and regulations to new situations?
- 7. Can your child safely operate all household appliances and mechanical devices?
- 8. Can you predict what your child will do when he/she is home alone, or does he/she frequently surprise you with his activities?

Has your child exhibited any of the following behaviors?

- 9. Playing with fire when no adult is present.
- 10. Playing with dangerous objects when no adult is present (tools, sporting equipment, electrical appliances, etc.).
- 11. Experimenting with chemicals (alcohol, family prescriptions, street drugs, sniffing of gasoline or other solvents).
- 12. Violent or aggressive behavior and/or is your child picked on by other children.
- 13. Is your child afraid of being home alone?

YES NO

- 14. Does your child have **known** medical problems that could be health threatening and come on without warning? (Diabetes, seizures, heart condition, asthma, allergies, etc.)
- 15. Does your child have a handicap that requires special consideration or does the child have a learning disability?

As parents there are certain things you can do to prepare your child for self care. Please answer the following questions that deal with your involvement in this preparation.

Answer "yes" or "no" to the following 10 questions.

YES NO

- 16. Do you consider your neighborhood safe? (Do you know local crime statistics, availability of police, fire and emergency medical services?)
- 17. Do you have adequate household security? (Dead bolt locks, yard lighting, smoke alarms, concerned neighbors, etc.)
- 18. Has your child been instructed in emergency procedures for his/her self and/or others should he/she be required to take care of siblings? (Calling for help, dealing with strangers.)
- 19. Have you talked to your child about his/her feelings about being home alone?
- 20. Have you prepared your child for self care (i.e. directions for cooking, emergency phone numbers, correct use of household appliances, keeping doors and windows locked)?
- 21. Do you always arrive home at the time you tell your child to expect you?
- 22. Is your child able to contact you while they are in self care or does your child have the phone number of an adult friend or neighbor to contact?
- 23. Has your child been instructed as to how to deal with strangers? (Code words, appropriate touch, not accepting rides, never revealing to a telephone caller that he/she is home alone.)
- 24. Can you trust your child?
- 25. Have you considered other alternatives for your child besides self care?

"SCORING KEY" is located on back page.

Scoring Key

If you answered "no" to any questions 1-8 or "yes" to any questions 9-15 it is highly recommended that you delay self care by your child until those areas can be remedied.

If you have answered "no" to any of the questions 16-25 delay self care for your child until these issues can be resolved.

You have now looked at your child's readiness for self care. All those areas that suggest remediation should be dealt with before your child begins self care.

This questionnaire should also be used on a regular basis to follow-up on your child's ability to give self care.

After you have determined your child's readiness for self care, you must decide the time limits for self care. Your child's age will suggest, along with his readiness, what may realistically be expected of your child at his/her normal stage of development. The following guide may be helpful.

Child's Age	Suggested Maximum Length of Time in Self Care
7-8 years	1/2 hour
8-9 years	1 hour
9-10 years	1 1/2 hours
10-11 years	2 hours

These are conservative estimates placing the health and safety of your child above all other considerations. All suggestions for length of self care should be appropriately adjusted downward if your child is responsible for a younger sibling.



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