

IS YOUR CHILD READY TO BE LEFT HOME ALONE?

The following are questions that can help parents determine whether their child is ready to be left home alone:

1. What are the local laws concerning unsupervised children? Is it legal to leave my child home alone?
2. Does the way in which my child has responded and problem-solved in past stressful or emergency situations show evidence of sufficient maturity to be left alone?
3. What activities do I want my child to participate in while left alone? What undesired activities might my child become involved in? (Recall that escalation of risky behavior may occur without adult supervision.)
4. Is my child comfortable staying home alone? (It is important to listen to any fears he or she might have.)
5. Do I feel comfortable leaving my child home alone?
6. Have I clearly spelled out the rules of the house and does my child understand them? House rules might address such topics as whether the child is allowed to have friends over (and if so, how many? Same sex only?), under what circumstances (if any) he is allowed to answer the door, which activities are off-limits, and whether he is expected to complete homework and/or chores before you arrive home.
7. Does the child know how to contact his parents, other responsible adults, and emergency personnel? It is imperative that a child be able to reach a responsible adult if necessary.
8. Does the child know what to do in case of an accident, fire, or intruder?
9. Has the child successfully completed a "trial run" of being home alone? It's a good idea to conduct a trial run that entails leaving the child home alone for a short time, during which he would be able to experience what being alone feels like-and also have an opportunity to practice self-care measures such as meal preparation and homework completion.

