



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade students

Is Your Child Ready to Stay Alone?

Knowing if a child is ready to spend time at home alone isn't always easy. Children vary in maturity, and many other important factors may have an influence on your decision. The age of your child by itself is not enough information to determine this.

There is no magic age at which a child is ready to stay at home alone, although readiness signs often appear between the ages of 10 and 12. Children should be at least 12 years old to look after younger children. Look for signs that give you an indication your child may be ready to stay at home alone. Readiness signs may include:

- being agreeable to staying home alone
- not being easily frightened
- showing signs of accepting responsibility
- awareness of the needs of others
- an ability to consider different options and solve problems
- independent decision-making skills
- the ability to use unstructured time wisely
- being ready for school on time
- completing homework and household chores without excessive prodding
- letting you know where they are going and when they will return

Location of Your Home Makes a Difference

You may feel your child is ready to stay home alone, but you have other important considerations, including these:

- Do you live in a remote area without close neighbors?
- Do you consider your neighborhood relatively safe?
- Is your home safe? Does it have working smoke detectors, correct storage of medications and chemicals, and locks on doors and windows? Also, does it have a reliable telephone?
- Can your child reach you or another responsible adult with whom to check in at agreed times or report an emergency?
- How long will your child be alone? What time of day? Will it be dark outside?
- Will your child have limited opportunities to socialize with other children or take part in after-school or community-sponsored activities because he or she is isolated at home?

After considering some of these factors, you may decide your child should not stay at home alone, even if he or she shows signs of readiness.



One sign that your child is ready to stay home alone is knowing that he or she is not easily frightened.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

With your student, make a list of 10 simple stretches and exercises. Write out, draw or take photos of someone doing the stretches. Plan a time for each day your family can do 10 of each exercise together. Ask your fourth grader to teach everyone the stretches and lead the family in doing them.

Families are Different

The circumstances in each family are different. The decision to try self-care won't be the same in every family. What appears to work successfully in another family may not work for yours.

Preparing Your Child for Self-care

If you choose self-care, preparing your child and yourself can make it a safe experience. Children who stay at home alone may need to react to a number of situations, such as:

- being locked out of the house
- unwelcome strangers at the door — on the telephone or computer
- a fire
- a storm
- a home accident needing First Aid
- peer pressure
- an animal bite or bee sting
- a child becoming ill

Teaching children telephone skills, personal safety skills and home safety skills is important so they are better prepared to handle possible emergency situations.

Have your family decide on house rules to serve as a guide when you are not home. House rules about the following may be helpful:

- leaving the house or yard
- inviting in friends
- telephone limitations and privileges
- homework
- household tasks
- television viewing/computer use/video gaming – choices and limits (programs to watch, viewing time, etc.)
- snack foods – kind and amount allowed
- kitchen – use of appliances and clean-up responsibilities after snacking
- what is off limits – access to power tools, firearms, your personal items
- other matters important to your family

Working with your child during an extended time on self-care guidelines usually is best. Too much information at one time may be overwhelming. Information usually is remembered better if situations are acted out. Practicing a fire drill, telephone conversations and responses to a pretend storm or stranger at the door may be good teaching tools.

Programs and home study materials are available in some communities to help parents work out a self-care plan. **Check with your NDSU Extension county office.**



Giving Self-care a Try

Once you have worked with your child and feel quite confident that they are prepared with adequate knowledge and skills to stay alone, you may want to set up a trial period. Begin by leaving your child in charge for short periods (an hour or less) during daylight hours. If your child knows this is a testing period, making needed changes may be easier.

During the trial period, make a special effort to talk frequently with your child about his or her feelings, discuss house rules and review safety skills. If you feel comfortable with your arrangement, proceed with confidence but be flexible in making changes as needed. Keep communicating about this important topic with your child. Feelings about being home alone, house rules and safety are important to discuss, even through the teen years and any time a family situation changes.



Go here for more information on this and other topics.

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