

Are Your Kids Ready to be Home Alone?

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One in four children ages 6 – 12 are regularly left home alone after school without adult supervision. Wisconsin children are even more likely to spend time home alone than the national average: one-quarter (1/4) of kids ages 6-12 are frequently on their own during the workweek. One study found that family income often isn't a factor in the decision, particularly among families of 10-12 year olds.

Children left home alone before they are ready are especially at risk for injury. Inability to lock or unlock doors, dial the telephone, solve problems independently, feel confident enough to ask another adult for help, or to recognize danger contribute directly to injuries among school-aged children. Most of these injuries occur between the hours of 3:00 and 7:00 pm, when many children are home alone.

There's no magic age when children develop the maturity and good sense they need to stay home alone. Some children display these qualities around age 12 or even sooner; others do so when they're older.

As spring approaches and the end of the school year looms, now is the time parents begin planning summer activities and child care. How can parents know if their children are ready to stay home alone? How can families protect children who are home alone from injury?

Parents who would like help deciding whether their child possesses the maturity to be alone can check out the Safe Communities' brochure, *Is Your Child Ready to Stay Home Alone?: Guidelines for Parents*. Because there's no magic age, this brochure includes a checklist that will help parents consider their child's readiness.

Is Your Child Ready to Stay Home Alone?: Guidelines for Parents can be downloaded in English and Spanish from Safe Communities' website at www.safercommunity.net (click on the "Home Alone" button).

If your child is not quite ready to go it alone, there are a variety of low-cost summer and after school programs that provide fun and safe alternatives to staying home. To find out about summer programs offered in _____ (insert your community name), contact _____ at _____. For help finding out about child care options, contact Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) at 271-9181 and ask for the Referral Department at extension 231.