



Children at Home Alone

Developmentally, children are generally ready to be home alone around the age of 12 or 13. However, children develop at different rates, so use your own discretion to determine your child's maturity level and capabilities. For example, if you have an impulsive 13-year-old who is a big risk taker, you might be hesitant to leave him or her alone. On the other hand, a thoughtful 11-year-old who has a good track record of following household rules might be ready. Most states, including Kansas, don't have regulations or laws about when a child is considered old enough to stay at home alone or babysit another child. But there are some suggestions and guidelines to help you make this important decision.

The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) has some general guidelines to help you make the decision when your child is ready to be home alone:

- **Age**— Young children from 0-6, should never be left alone for even a short period of time. Kids 6-9 can be left alone for only short periods of time. Children 10 and older can be left alone, depending on other factors.
- **Length of time alone**— Consider whether your child is ready to spend the whole day alone or if only a couple of hours is more appropriate. The first time your kids stay home alone, it should be for a short time and you should be nearby.
- **Maturity**— Consider your child's ability to fend for himself/herself and your child's level of common sense. Certainly, children with developmental disabilities and emotion issues should be monitored closely.
- **Knowledge of emergency preparedness**— Ask your child if he/she knows what to do in the event of a fire, tornado, stranger at the door, etc. Ask "what ifs."
- **Availability of adults**— Children must know how to reach a responsible adult at any point in the day for any reason, even if it's just to provide reassurance if the child becomes fearful.
- **Insecurity**— Children should feel comfortable with the idea that they will be home alone. The more fearful he/she is, the less likely he/she will be able to respond appropriately to emergency situations.
- **Behavior**—children who misbehave, vandalize, steal, intimidate neighbors, set fires or are a danger to themselves need close supervision.

Safe Kids Kansas also recommends parents take the following precautions to ensure your child's safety:

- Carry a cell phone and keep it turned on. Make sure your children know where you will be and what time you will return. In addition to your cell phone number, post emergency numbers (police, fire, EMS, doctor and the poison control hotline, 800-222-1222) and a friend or neighbor's number by every phone in the home. Teach your child their home address so they can tell emergency personnel where to dispatch assistance, if necessary.
- Prepare a snack or meal in advance — preferably one that does not need to be heated. If your children will need to cook, remind them never to leave an oven or stove unattended while cooking and to turn it off when they are finished.

- Make sure potentially poisonous or hazardous household items are locked up out of reach — especially medications, matches, lighters, weapons and cleaning products.
- Review your family’s emergency plans and make sure your children know what to do if the smoke alarm or carbon monoxide detector goes off. Practice two escape routes from each room.
- Review and practice plans for other types of emergencies, such as severe weather. Ensure they know where to go for emergency shelter.
- Show your children where you keep your first aid kit and how to use basic first aid supplies.

