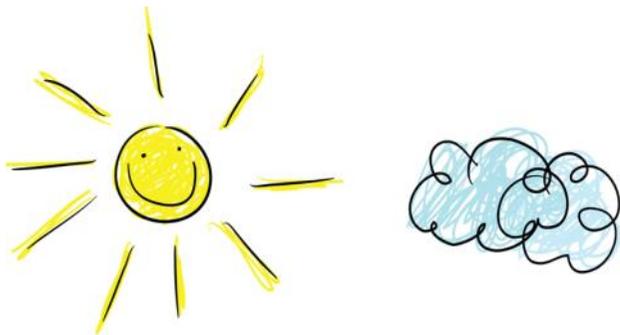


Home Alone

Your guide to keeping
your child safe



**If you don't know who
to ask....ask us!**

As a parent/carer, looking after your child is your number one priority. But sometimes you might have to spend time away from your child, whether it's to go to work, go out for the evening or just to nip out to the shops.

There's no legally set age at which it's OK to leave your child at home alone. It depends on whether your child is mature enough to cope in an emergency and feels happy about being left alone. Children mature at different ages and every child is an individual.



Your children rely on you to protect them and you are responsible for making sure that they are happy and well looked after in your absence.

So how can you tell if your child is mature enough? What are the dangers and risks of leaving yours at home alone?



Here is some of the best advice from professionals, as well as some top tips from parents, to help you decide whether to leave your child at home alone and what you need to do if you're not there.

Remember

- **Never leave your baby or young child home alone,**

not even for a few minutes, regardless of whether they are sleeping or awake. The risks and dangers are too great.

- **If your child is under the age of about 12,**

they may not be mature enough to cope with an emergency. They should not be left alone for more than a very short time. And remember to put all obvious dangers out of reach before you go, such as medicines, matches and sharp objects.

- **Even when leaving older children alone,**

make sure that they are happy about the arrangement and that they know how to contact the emergency services. Keep your mobile phone with you and make sure they know your number so they can call you if you're needed.

- **If your child is under the age of 16**

they shouldn't be left alone overnight.

- **Teach your child about what to do if there's ever a problem.**

Leave a list of people you trust that they could go to or could telephone, such as a neighbour or close relative.

Did you know?

There's no legal age limit for leaving a child on their own, but it's an offence to do so if it places them at risk. Parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health".

What is neglect?

If you fail to meet your child's basic needs, such as food and warm clothing, or constantly leave your child alone, this is known as neglect. Neglect is as serious as other forms of child abuse because the effects can be just as damaging and long-lasting.

Find out more

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Provides information and leaflets for parents on safety in the home.

www.rospa.com

0121 248 2000

help@rospa.com

What's your verdict?

NSPCC responds with advice from three parents talking about leaving their children home alone.

Problems sleeping

"It's hard for me to get my baby girl to sleep. She nodded off just as I was leaving to pick up my son from nursery, and I couldn't face waking her up. I didn't think that she could come to any harm in just 15 minutes, so I left her at home alone while I collected my son." **Sophie, mum of Ben, 3, and Izzy, 7 months**

NSPCC "It is never ok to leave your baby alone in the house, not even for a few minutes. What if she had woken up just after you left? For a baby, 15 minutes is a long time to feel abandoned and left alone to cry. The risks are dangerous too – what if you were delayed or your baby was sick?"



Find out more

Family Information Service
Provides information on childcare options for parents.

www.glofamiliedirectory.org.uk
0800 542 02 02
familyinfo@gloucestershire.gov.uk

One Parent Families/Gingerbread
(includes One Parent Families Scotland)

www.gingerbread.org.uk
0800 018 5026
info@oneparentfamilies.org.uk

Long hours

“We both have very demanding jobs and really have to put in the hours. The children have a key to let themselves in after school and they look after themselves for a few hours. We make sure they have emergency numbers if they need them, and we teach them to never answer the door to strangers.”

Scott, dad of James, 11, and Josh, 9



NSPCC “Most nine to 12-year-olds are not mature enough to be left on their own for more than a very short while – and certainly not every day. Before you decide, make sure that your children feel happy and confident about being left alone and they know where you are and what to do in an emergency.”

Social life

“I’m bringing up my two young boys on my own. The only way I can ever have an evening out is if I go when they’re asleep at night. I’m only gone for a couple of hours and they never wake up anyway, so there’s no harm in it.” **John, dad of Billy, 6 and Paul, 2**

NSPCC “It is never safe to leave your young children home alone at night, even if they are asleep. What if they suddenly woke from a bad dream and came looking for you? As a single parent, finding time for you may be difficult. Why not try to find another parent in your area and arrange to take turns to babysit?”

Remember it's
never worth putting
your child's safety or
emotional wellbeing
at risk.

Do you need a babysitter ?

It is OK for you to make time for yourself, but only if your child is safe and appropriately cared for. If you are nervous about leaving your child, use someone you trust, like grandparents or a friend to begin with, before you use babysitters.

When deciding if you need to use a babysitter it's useful to think about the needs of the child, the length of time you are away and the skills of your chosen carer.

Things to check out when selecting a babysitter

- **Check the babysitter's age.** Although there are no laws about the age of the babysitter, you need to think hard before using a young person under 16. If you use a younger sitter and harm comes to your child, you may be held responsible. And remember even a 16 year old may not be mature enough.
- **Follow your instincts.** If you have any doubts about a babysitter or other carer, don't take them on. Always ask for at least two references and check these carefully.
- **Listen to your child.** If your child seems to be unhappy about a particular babysitter, find someone else.

Childminders

If you would prefer to use a Ofsted registered childminder contact Family Information Service who can provide you with a detailed list. Call 0800 542 02 02 / 01452 427362

Questions to ask a potential babysitter or childminder

- What experience do you have of looking after children?
- Do you have first aid skills?
- What do you enjoy most about looking after children?
- What do you think is unacceptable behaviour?
- How would you deal with unacceptable behaviour?
- What would you do in an emergency?

Useful Contacts

Glos Families Directory— 0800 542 0202

www.glofamiliedirectory.org.uk

An on line resource containing, national, regional and local information about services and activities for children, young people and families with children aged 0—19 years (25 years for young people with additional needs).

NSPCC — 0808 800 5000

www.nspcc.org.uk

Family Lives (Parentlineplus) — 0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT)

www.capt.org.uk

Gloucestershire's Family Information Service - featuring the 'Local Offer'



Free, impartial information, advice and support for families with children and young people aged 0-25.

familyinfo@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Direct Line: 01452 427362

Call: 0800 542 02 02

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
(answering machine at all other times)

 @GlosFIS

 Family Information Service - Gloucestershire

www.glosfamiliesdirectory.org.uk

The Key—*Disabled children's and young people's register*

thekey@gloucestershire.gov.uk



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