



HOME ALONE & CHILD-MINDING

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS



Home Alone & Child-Minding Considerations for Parents and Guardians

The following is an outline of the considerations parents can take to develop an appropriate child-minding/care plan for their family's situation.

INTRODUCTION

Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act (Section 136) states that "a child under the age of 16 may not be left unattended without making provision for his or her supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances".

As a parent or guardian of a child under the age of sixteen, what circumstances do you need to consider? The Act asks you to think about your child's age, mental ability, physical condition, the length of the adult's absence, and the home environment – or, any combination of factors that creates a situation where the child may be at risk of harm.

There is no minimum legal age for when children can become babysitters in Canada. It is common for them to start as early as 12, with the various factors stated above considered. A babysitter or child-minder's number one priority is looking after the children, not entertaining friends, listening to music, watching TV, using the computer, etc. It is the job of the parent or guardian to hire a babysitter to look after their child or children safely.

WHEN CAN A CHILD BE LEFT HOME ALONE?

AGE	GENERAL GUIDELINES
5-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should not be left home alone• May play unsupervised for up to 30 minutes when a parent or child-minder can check-in regularly with the child and can see what they are doing easily and can quickly intervene in the case of danger• May be taught to walk to school independently, however, it is preferred that children are accompanied by a caregiver when walking to school or waiting for the school bus until Grade 2
8-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should not be left alone

AGE	GENERAL GUIDELINES
8–9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a parent or childminder is at home, may play unsupervised in the immediate neighbourhood for up to 1 hour IF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the child knows general safety rules ✓ the child knows what to do in case of fire, power outage and other emergencies ✓ the safety of the external and internal environment has been assessed ✓ the developmental age and abilities of the child have been considered ✓ the child is generally cooperative and follows rules There should not be a pattern of leaving a child unsupervised
10–11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May occasionally be left alone at home for up to 1–2 hours provided they have no fear or anxiety staying home alone and the child's level of maturity matches this arrangement Should not be home alone overnight or to take care of younger siblings or friends Parents should teach children in this age group the following general safety rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ how to react in case of a fire, power outage and other emergencies ✓ how to use the telephone and how to answer the telephone or door (and know the dangers of each) ✓ whom to contact in an emergency ✓ where to find emergency and contact numbers ✓ where to find emergency supplies, a flashlight and first aid kit, and how to use them ✓ how to use a house key responsibly ✓ how to set limits with friends ✓ where to play, with whom and for how long Most communities offer home alone safety courses for this age group and older
12–16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recommended that children in this age group are not left alone overnight Children in this age group can often babysit younger children A babysitter is someone who can follow safety rules, has a babysitting certificate, and has shown commitment to taking care of younger children by learning the appropriate safety skills

Note a 12-13 year old babysitter should:

- Care for a maximum of 2 children
- Not be responsible for cooking, supervising swimming, or giving children a bath
- Always have a parent or responsible adult 5 minutes away for help or consultation
- Not babysit after midnight or for periods longer than 4 hours per day

IS YOUR CHILD READY TO BE HOME ALONE? SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEYOND THE GENERAL AGE GUIDELINES INCLUDE:

FOUNDATIONAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:	YES	NO
Is your child physically and mentally able to care for themselves?		
Does your child tend to be a rule follower and make good decisions?		
Does your child feel safe and comfortable with being home alone?		
If you can answer 'YES' to above three questions, discuss the following questions to learn more about how prepared your child is to stay at home safely.		
1. How does your child respond to unfamiliar or stressful situation? <i>Have them walk through plans of responding to different situations that may arise where they need to problem solve.</i>		
2. How long will you be gone? Does it align with the general guidelines for their age range?		
3. Will you be gone during daytime or nighttime hours? Does it align with the general guidelines for their age range?		
4. Will older siblings or kids be with your child? <i>Leaving older children to look after their younger siblings without guidelines can lead to an increased risk of injury to the younger child. It can impact the sense of security of the youngest child if the older sibling is not responsible/mature enough to care for them. Making it clear that the older sibling is "the boss" empowers the older child to assume the responsibility and increase their supervision, while ensuring everyone is clear who is in charge.</i>		
5. How safe is your neighbourhood? Do you have trustworthy neighbours who will check in on your children if something does not seem right?		
6. Can your children reach you when you are away?		

YOUR CHILD IS READY TO STAY HOME ALONE, NOW WHAT? RULE SETTING:

Every family needs their own rules for when kids are home alone. It's important to discuss your expectations with your child. Make a plan together so that everyone is clear of the expectations.

TOPIC	OUR PLAN/ACTION/RULES
Is it okay for your child to open the door to a stranger or a neighbour? How should they handle this?	

TOPIC	OUR PLAN/ACTION/RULES
Is it okay for your child to have a friend over when parents are not at home? Which friends? How many at one time?	
Is it okay for your child to leave the house while you are gone (friend, neighbourhood, other?) Which ones are okay and which ones not?	
<p>Who should your child call in an emergency?</p> <p>Make sure your child has memorized your address, knows how to use the phone (unlock it if necessary) and knows your phone number.</p>	
When possible, which neighbour should your child turn to if there is an immediate need? Designate a safe space/house they can run to if they are in danger.	
Is it okay for your child to use the stove or cook when parents are away? What will they eat?	
<p>What restrictions have you placed on internet use or TV watching?</p> <p>It is recommended to limit unsupervised access to electronics, including video games and social media. Without parental oversight, social media can provide opportunities for children to bully each other, predators to target, and unhealthy access to groups/networks to be formed.</p>	
Other considerations/rules your family requires?	

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

<https://canadasafetycouncil.org/product/home-alone-program/>

<https://canadasafetycouncil.org/product-category/for-youth/>

<https://casontario.blogspot.com/p/can-i-leave-my-child-alone-guidelines.html>