

Legally speaking...

Did you know?

March 2006
Subject: Family

CHILDREN HOME ALONE

While community based child care programs or Before- and- After School Clubs fit the needs of many families, some older school age children begin to insist on coming home after school at about age 10. As a result many kids are staying home on their own for a few hours till their parents get home.

When is it OK to leave a child alone?

There really isn't any legislated age when the law says it is OK to leave a child alone. Parents must use their judgment about whether it is safe and their child is mature enough to handle their absence.

When social workers from the Ministry of Children & Family Development get involved in a child's welfare, they look at lots of factors. These include the child's age, maturity, ability to access help, their comfort level, and the amount of time the child is alone.

The Canada Safety Council recommends that parents should not consider letting a child stay at home alone before age 10—and then only if the child is mature enough.

Each individual family has to make a careful assessment of their child's readiness to assume responsibility for his/her own care at home and have a well thought out plan of action for the child's safety.

Here are some questions to ask yourself in deciding if your child is ready to be on his/her own.

- Does your child wish to be on his own?
- Can you trust your child to be responsible and to follow the rules?
- Would he/she be able to handle an emergency situation if one were to arise?
- Does he/she feel comfortable being alone at home?
- Do you feel comfortable in your child being on his/her own?

Once you have answered these questions and have decided that it is OK for your child to be on his/her own at home, you need to prepare for his/her safety and wellbeing. For information on safety tips see the Fact Sheet: "Children Home Alone - Safety Practices".

For More Information

- 1) Canada Safety Council at www.safety-council.org. To prepare children to be on their own, they have a booklet entitled **At Home On My Own**, which focuses on how to prevent problems and handle real-life situations.
- 2) Check with your child's school or other community agencies serving families and their children regarding Home Alone Courses that are offered. These courses are usually geared to 10 years and up.



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