

Is your child ready to stay home alone?

Unfortunately, no magic age exists when children develop the maturity and good sense they need to stay home alone. However, you can look for signs that show your child may be ready. Your decision should be made together when both of you feel ready for self-care to begin. Every family's situation is different, and your plan will depend on where you live and nearby resources.

As children get to be 9-12 years old, they may begin to ask if they can go home after school. Care may be harder to find or become too expensive.



The transition for children to stay home alone is a big step for every family. Some children may be ready for the responsibility, but take time to prepare your child and yourself for this important transition.

Children should indicate a desire and willingness to stay alone. Your child should be showing signs of responsibility and being aware of the needs of others (if caring for siblings) and should be able to consider alternatives and make decisions independently.

Also, your child should be able to talk with you about interests and concerns.

Illinois law defines a neglected minor, in part, as:
“any minor under the age of 14 years whose parent or other person responsible for the minor’s welfare leaves the minor without supervision for an unreasonable period of time without regard for the mental or physical health, safety or welfare of that minor.”

Juvenile Court Act. 705 ILCS
405/2-3 (1) (d)

15 Factors to Consider When Deciding If Your Child Should Stay Home Alone

In Illinois, there is not a legal age specified for staying home alone. What is appropriate under certain circumstances may be considered child neglect in other circumstances. Illinois law lists 15 specific factors to be considered when deciding whether a child has been left alone for an unreasonable period of time.

1. The age of the minor.
2. The number of minors left at the location.
3. Special needs of the minor, including whether the minor is physically or mentally handicapped, or otherwise in need of ongoing prescribed medical treatment.
4. The duration of time in which the minor was left without supervision.
5. The condition and location of the place where the child was left without supervision.
6. The time of day or night when the minor was left without supervision.
7. The weather conditions; adequate heat or light.
8. The location of the parent or guardian, the physical distance from the minor.
9. Whether the minor's movement was restricted (locked in a room).
10. Whether the minor was given a phone number of a person or location to call in the event of an emergency and whether the minor was capable of making an emergency call.
11. Whether food and other provisions were left for the minor.
12. Whether any of the conduct is attributable to economic hardship or illness and the parent, guardian or other person having physical custody or control of the child made a good faith effort to provide for the health and safety of the minor.
13. The age and physical and mental capabilities of the person(s) who provided supervision for the minor.
14. Whether the minor was left under the supervision of another person.
15. Any other factor that would endanger the health and safety of that particular minor.