

At What Age Can My Child Be Left Home Alone?

Every year, thousands of parents/guardians ask this question to Child Safe Canada. The age at which children can be left at home alone for reasonable periods varies by province, ranging from 10 to 12 years of age. No child under the age of 10 should be left alone for any period of time.

Being home alone is not an event. It's a process!

Know the law. Alberta's Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act explains that if a child's safety is endangered by not having adequate care or supervision (e.g., being left home alone), then that child may be considered neglected.

- Neglect is determined by assessing the length of time the child is left alone, the frequency with which it occurs, and the degree of isolation in conjunction with the child's age, maturity level, knowledge, responsibilities, and available resources. If neglect is indicated, child protection may then intervene.
- It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to ensure that a child has the skills and resources to react appropriately in an emergency. The home must present minimal risk by being safe and secure, and the child must have access to a basic first aid kit, reliable telephone, emergency contacts, and support system.

Teach home alone skills over time. Being able to be home alone is a process that should be initiated with gradual and supervised stages.

- Start with small periods of time, slowly increasing commensurate with the child's skills and maturity level. Always make sure that the child is remotely supervised and supported, with direct access to assistance in case of difficult or frightening situations.
- Reinforce household safety rules regularly and monitor the process closely. Offer or revoke home alone time according to the child's demonstrated level of maturity.

Focus on comfort and confidence. An important and often overlooked aspect of home alone safety is the focus on comfort and confidence. How does your child feel about being home alone? If youth are scared or nervous, they will not react safely in an emergency. Guide them through the important steps of becoming independent by fostering a deep respect for the privilege of being home alone and the anticipation of being offered more independence and responsibility.

Educate thoroughly. Throughout Canada, Child Safe Canada offers Home Alone Safety (ages 10+), a course to fulfill all the safety and educational requirements to begin the process of being home alone. It doesn't matter whether a child is properly educated at home or through a community program—what matters is that it gets done!

“Prevention Is the Key to Safety”

Child Safe Canada
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