



OKLAHOMA
Human Services

Guidelines for Leaving a Child at Home Alone



Child Protective Services Response to Reports of Children Left Alone

The focus of DHS Child Welfare Services is to respond to situations where children are reported to be unsafe or at risk of harm. Action is contingent upon the child's age, cognitive, and physical abilities; access to the alleged perpetrator; and the degree of danger.

DHS cannot remove a child from his or her home without a court order; however, if it is determined that a child cannot take care of him- or herself and no responsible adult is available, the child may be placed into police protective custody.



In Oklahoma, no statutory or public policy requirements exist on the age a child must be in order to be left at home alone. The safety and well-being of children is a parental responsibility. A parent determines if his or her child, six years of age and older, is developmentally, physically, and cognitively able to care for himself or herself in an adult's absence.

Considerations When Leaving a Child Alone at Home

- Is the child cognitively or physically delayed? If so, do these delays require heightened supervision?
- What is the frequency and length of time the child will be left alone?
- What time of day will the child be alone?
- Does the child have access to an adult, such as a neighbor or an older sibling who is able to provide safe care for the child?
- Do the caregiver(s) and the child have a plan in the event of an emergency?
- Does the child have the developmental capacity to execute the emergency plan when necessary?
- Does the child have access to a phone? Are emergency phone numbers posted in the home?

- Does the child demonstrate maturity to follow the established rules when left alone?
- Can the child use household appliances properly?
- Is the child responsible for the care of younger children?
- Has the child expressed concerns about being left alone at home?
- Are there known potentially dangerous adults that would attempt to engage the child while home alone?



Recommended Guidelines for Parental Decision-Making

Pre-School/Kindergarten/Early Elementary

- Children under six years of age are never left alone without adequate supervision.
- Children six through seven years of age are rarely left home alone due to their developmental level. When left home alone, the timeframe is minimal, less than one hour during the day, with access to a responsible adult and not responsible for the care of younger children.

Older Elementary

- Assess the child's development and functioning when leaving the child alone at home.
- In general, the timeframe for being left alone is one to two hours during the day with access to a responsible adult and not caring for younger children.

Middle School

- Assess the child's development and functioning when leaving the child alone at home.
- In general, the timeframe for being left alone is up to four hours during the day or the evening. When able, the child may provide care for one to two younger children during this timeframe with access to a responsible adult.



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