

# Home Alone Safety Tips for Children

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human services there is no age specified by law that a child can be left alone in North Carolina. Parents and caretakers must look at the child's maturity, the safety of the community, and access to emergency assistance. For children that are staying home alone in the summer or after school here are some safety tips.

## Before allowing your child to stay home alone, you should...

- Make sure that your child feels comfortable staying home alone. Confirm that they are able to follow directions and make wise decisions.
- Designate a nearby contact in case of an emergency. This can be a trusted neighbor, friend or relative.
- Set specific rules for your child to follow while they are home alone.
- Leave contact information for yourself, and specific instructions on whom to call if your child can't reach you right away.
- Create practice situations for your child showing what he or she may face when home alone including what to do if the telephone rings or the electricity goes out.

## If you've decided to allow your child to stay home alone, make sure he or she knows...

- His or her full name, address, and telephone number.
- Your full name, the exact name of the places where you are when not at home, and all contact information that may be used to reach you when you are not at home.
- Appropriate ways to **request help in an emergency** using 911 or other emergency number(s) used in your area.
- How to arm and disarm the home security system. Make sure they know the code word to cancel police dispatch in case they accidentally set off the alarm.
- Appropriate ways to carry his or her key so it is hidden and secure. Your name and address should not be on the key, and it may be wise to leave an extra key with a trusted adult.
- **Key safety tips** including to
  - Always check out the home before entering. Go to a designated safe place to call for help if something doesn't seem right.
  - Always lock the door after entering and make sure the house is secure.
  - Turn off the alarm when entering the home and then reset in the "stay" mode. The alarm will go off if someone opens a door or window that has an alarm sensor on it when it is in stay mode but the motion detector will not activate the alarm.
  - Immediately check in with you upon returning home to let you know he or she has arrived safely.



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- If there is a change in plans or your child is running late teach him or her to inform you of that change. Have your child remind you if activities he or she participates in will cause a schedule change.
  - Always **tell callers you aren't available** to take a telephone call and offer to take a message instead of letting people know he or she is home alone.
  - Never open the door for or talk to anyone who calls or comes to the home unless that person is on a preapproved list of trusted adults you have provided to your child and you have approved the call or visit.
- Always stay alert for true emergencies such as a fire or gas leak that would require him or her to leave the home.
- Always check with you or another trusted adult if he or she has doubts about anything.

## As a parent or guardian, you should...

- Provide a daily schedule of homework, chores, and activities for your child to follow.
- Keep a list close to the telephone including numbers for you, law enforcement, the fire department, an ambulance service, your doctor, a poison-control center, and a trusted adult who's available in case of an emergency.
- Provide written instructions about which, if any, appliances may be used;
- Limit the kind of cooking that can be done absent adult supervision.
- Provide a plan in case you are detained and what to do if your child's plans change.
- Provide instructions about specific activities such as watching television; using a computer, gaming system, or wireless device; talking with others; and having friends in the home when you aren't there.
- **Keep a first aid kit in the house.** Teach your child basic first aid.
- Make sure there are working smoke detectors on every floor of the house and teach your child what to do in case of fire. Practice fire and emergency evacuation routes with your children.
- Keep a flashlight and batteries in an easily accessible place in case of power outage.
- Regularly re-assess your situation expanding responsibilities if you feel your child is ready. Staying home alone is an opportunity for learning and mastering new skills.

