

Prepare your child to be home alone

For many families with children between the ages of 10 and 12, the time comes to decide if your child is ready to care for him or her self. This transition is a big step and should be made with careful consideration. While children are generally developmentally ready to stay home alone around 12 years of age, they develop at different rates so parents need to use their own good judgment. Most importantly, consider a child's maturity level and capabilities.

To help you in making the decision, check to be sure they:

- are comfortable staying home alone (feel safe and capable).
- know various ways to reach you.
- understand how to handle an accident or emergency (see below).
- can manage simple jobs like fixing a snack and taking a phone message.
- can solve simple problems independently.
- are mature enough to know when and how to seek help.
- understand and can follow rules you have set.

There are many steps you can take to ease your worries and help protect your child when home alone. Be sure to have a clear conversation addressing the following:

- Structure your child's time and post the schedule (homework, chores, free time)
- Set clear restrictions/instructions (including use of TV, computer, phone, friends, kitchen appliances, answering the door, snack choices, outside time, etc.)
- Childproof your home (lock medications, firearms and alcohol)
- Calling for 911 or situations in which to call a parent/neighbor for help
- Fire exit and severe weather plans
- Not to enter the home if a door or window is open/broken
- Review basic first aid and put together a first aid kit

Make sure your child is ready to stay home alone by leaving them alone for short periods of time (such as while you run an errand) and then begin increasing the length of time as you both feel more comfortable.

Take time to consider various options and resist making a quick decision on your child's readiness to stay home alone. Continually evaluate your arrangement and be flexible to change your choices and/or rules as necessary. This is a time of increased responsibility and independence for your child, and together you can build the abilities and confidence needed.

Healthy Recipe: Sugar Snaps with easy Honey Mustard

1 pound sugar snap peas
2/3 cup plain yogurt
¼ cup honey
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

Bring a large saucepan of lightly salted water to a rapid boil and add sugar snaps. Immediately drain and plunge into a bowl of ice water for five minutes. Drain and pat dry.

Combine yogurt, honey and Dijon mustard in a small bowl for dipping.

Activity: Sponge and Water Fun

Split into teams. Each team needs two buckets-one empty and one filled with water and a large sponge. Each team lines up with a bucket of water at the front of the line. The team passes the wet sponges over their heads to the end of the line. The last person squeezes the sponge out into the other bucket and then runs to the front of the line and starts the process again. Set a time limit of five minutes and the team at the end who has the most water in the once empty bucket is the winner. If you don't have enough people to make a team, simply tossing water filled sponges into a half-filled bucket of water (without knocking it over) is fun too.

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