

Self Care

Ready?

Or Not?



Child Care
Resources

Southwest Michigan 4C

Self Care

There comes a time when you must decide if your child is ready to care for himself. It is recommended not to leave a child under 10 years home alone, but there is no magic age or "right" time for a child to be responsible for his own care. You must consider the child's maturity level, his ability to handle a variety of situations and your own comfort level before you make any decision.



Making decisions for the care of an older child is a challenge for all parents. Take time to consider various ideas and options and resist making quick decisions. Every child is a unique individual and what works for one child may not necessarily work for yours.

Continually evaluate your arrangements and be flexible. Consider new ideas and change your choices if your plan doesn't work. Add or change rules if necessary. Your workable plan may breakdown along the way as activities and sports start and finish, a dance lesson is unexpectedly canceled or there is a weather emergency. Talk often with your child and listen to her likes and dislikes, fears and frustrations, joys and triumphs. This is a time of increased responsibility and independence for her. Together you can build on her ability and confidence to care for herself.

If your child is NOT ready to stay home alone, call Child Care Resources, Southwest Michigan 4C, at 866-4CHILDCARE (866-424-4532) for information about after-school programs, child care, youth organizations and other options.

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DISCLAIMER: Ultimately, each parent needs to make their own assessment of their child's ability to stay home alone and to determine what is best for their child.

Is Your Child Ready to Stay Home Alone?

The following checklist may help you make that decision. Use the checklist as a tool to determine whether self care is appropriate for your child. If you answer "yes" to most of the following questions, this may indicate your child is ready to stay alone.

- ◆ Has my child handled brief periods of being left alone well?
- ◆ Will my child come straight home after school?
- ◆ Will my child be lonely or frightened by himself?
- ◆ Can my child manage simple jobs like fixing a snack and taking phone messages?
- ◆ Is my child physically able to unlock and lock the doors at home?
- ◆ Can my child solve small problems himself?
- ◆ Does my child know when and how to seek outside help?
- ◆ Is my child prepared to handle an accident or an emergency?
- ◆ Will my child follow the rules set for him and use his time productively?
- ◆ If there will be more than one child at home, do they generally get along with each other?
- ◆ Does my child know how to reach parents at work - or two other adults in case of an emergency?
- ◆ Is our neighborhood generally safe?



Some information in this booklet was taken from Child Care Aware, a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

Things to Discuss with Your Child...

1. Do NOT let anyone see your key or know that you are going home alone. If you have to get a hidden key out of its hiding place be sure that NO ONE sees you get it.

2. Answering the telephone

a. If, when, and how to answer.
What information NOT to give to the caller, an excuse why the adult can't come to the telephone (in the shower, etc.).



b. Answering machines/Caller ID can be lifesavers. Instruct the child not to answer the telephone unless it's an approved person.

3. Emergency contact information

Near EVERY telephone post a list of emergency phone numbers that may be needed. Do this even if the child has all of this information memorized, in an emergency sometimes we don't always think clearly.

- ◆ Police, fire, ambulance, poison control, doctor



- ◆ All parent/guardian numbers (work, cell)

- ◆ Neighbors, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. (Daytime numbers)

- ◆ The COMPLETE address of the residence should be posted near every phone.

- ◆ Include directions for getting to the home - major streets and landmarks (i.e.: near Main and Lake Street, take a right at the Lakeview exit, the house is just north of Johnson's farm).

4. Answering the door: HOW, WHEN and IF to answer/open the door.

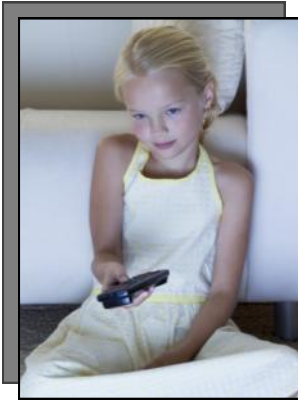
5. Rules for walking home, if applicable.

6. What appliances can/cannot be used; practice using those that are okay to be used.

BEFORE He or She is Home Alone

7. What the child can/cannot do for activities:

- a. Watching TV – Is there a time limit or restrictions on the types of programs allowed, are cable channels approved? Remember, weather alerts are usually only on the local broadcast channels. With the child make a list of approved shows/channels.



- b. Is the child allowed to use the internet while parents are not at home?
- c. Can the child go outside while home alone?
- d. Can the child go to a friend's home; should he contact a parent before going, leave a note, etc?
- e. Can the child have friends over while the parents are gone? What needs to happen first?
- f. Is he/she allowed to prepare food/eat while alone?

8. What kind of check-in procedure will you have?

- a. Call the parent, check in with the neighbor, etc?
- b. Should the child check in at certain intervals? (Upon arrival from school/other function, hourly, etc.)
- c. What is the child expected to do while home alone? Homework, chores, etc.

9. What to do in emergencies? (What would you do if...)

- a. A severe weather alert was issued?
- b. There were smoke or fire?
- c. An injury occurred?
- d. There were strangers about (on the walk home, in the yard, at the door, etc.)?
- e. You arrived home to find the door/windows open or broken open or other signs that someone was/had been in the home? (Go to a neighbor's or predetermined place.)

You Can Make Self Care Easier for Your Child

1. Make sure your child is emotionally, intellectually, and physically ready for self care.
2. Go over the rules.
3. Provide food that is easy to prepare or prepackaged. Remind the child not to walk away from something that is cooking, including anything in the microwave. Remind him that metals/foils can't be put into the microwave, even the metallic wrappers from fast-food items.
4. Provide someone for the child to call if they are lonely or scared.
5. Provide an activity for the child to do to keep them busy.
6. Enroll them in some activities outside the home.
7. Get them an older "buddy" to come to the house and to keep them company or take them to activities.
8. Get them involved in a hobby, check out books from the library.
9. Leave little notes of support, or reminders of things to do.
10. Do a safety check of your home, looking for potential danger or trouble spots.
11. Keep the lines of communication open!! Be sure to ask about their day, how they are feeling about being home alone and if there is anything that would make self-care easier. Give LOTS of positive feedback!



Safety Rules Every Child Should Follow

1. They should never open the door for anyone - nor peek through the blinds to look out.
2. Use caller ID or an answering machine to screen calls.
3. Teach your children how to answer the phone and take messages without indicating they are alone.
4. Have a plan of action in case something goes wrong. Children should know emergency numbers, parents' work numbers, and numbers of neighbors or relatives who could step in quickly.
5. Practice what they would do and say if they needed to call 911. Have them give their full name, address, phone number, and stay on the line until emergency personnel instructs them to hang up.
6. Should a neighbor or relative check in regularly with your child?
7. Go over fire procedures and practice escaping by two routes from every room.
8. Review basic first aid procedures; put together a first aid kit.
9. Have a flashlight available in good working order.
10. Unless you have discussed otherwise, instruct them to stay in the house until you come home.
11. If your child leaves the house for some reason, does he know to look for a person in uniform, such as a police officer, store security guard, or go to a store clerk, preferably a woman, in case he is lost?
12. Don't make your child responsible for food preparation. Have food and snacks that can be heated in microwave, eaten cold from refrigerator or require no preparation.
13. Don't allow your child to have company unless you have pre-approved it.



Other Things to Consider and/or Talk About

Poisonous substances: Put labels on dangerous chemicals and warn the children not to handle them – ever! This includes ammonia, bleach, and insecticides, drain cleaners and paint thinners or removers.

Medicine: Children should NEVER take any medicines without adult supervision or instructions.

Cigarettes, matches, alcohol, and firearms: Every precaution must be taken to assure that the child does not have access to these items. Consider locking them up.

Be sure the first aid kits are stocked and that the child knows where to find them. The flashlights should have fresh batteries and bulbs, and there should be extra of each available.

Show the child the fuse box/circuit breaker box in case you need to “talk” them through a problem.

Make sure the door locks are functioning.

Discuss the use of knives and other sharp instruments in the kitchen and in the toolbox.

You may want to purchase a very family-friendly first-aid handbook.

Be sure your expectations are clear.

Make sure rules are understood and consequences are in place if rules are not followed.

Call home at unpredictable times to see how they are doing, but also to let them know you will be checking up.



How Well Do You Know Your Child?

1. Who is your child's best friend?
2. Who is your child's hero?
3. What embarrasses your child the most?
4. What is your child's biggest fear?
5. What is your child's favorite subject at school?
6. What is your child's least favorite subject at school?
7. What kind of music does your child like?
8. If your child could buy anything in the world, what would it be?
9. What is your child's favorite TV show?
10. What has been the biggest disappointment of your child's life?
11. Of what is your child proudest in his/her life?
12. Does your child feel too big, too small, or just right for his/her age?
13. Who, outside of family members, has influenced your child's life?
14. What would be the best gift you could give your child?



Make an Activity Plan for Home-Along Kids

Let's find a balance between recreational activities and tasks at home!

FAMILY MEMBER

NAME: _____

THINGS I LIKE TO DO:

Activity	Why I like it

RESPONSIBILITIES I HAVE:

(Discuss these as a family, list the daily/weekly activities each family member can do, indicate the amount of time each task will take to complete; choose the time of day when the task should be done.)

COMPLETE ONE OF THESE FORMS FOR EACH FAMILY MEMBER!

TASK	Amount of Time needed to do Task	Time Task is to be Done

NOTES:



Child Care Resources

Southwest Michigan 4C

OUR MISSION:

Child Care Resources works with parents, child care providers, businesses and the community to improve access to quality child care and early education so that every child enjoys safe, nurturing and inspiring care.

Our VISION:

It is our vision that Child Care Resources will be the essential community resource in all matters related to child care, including referral, training, education and advocacy.

Serving the southwest Michigan counties of:
Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo,
St. Joseph and Van Buren.

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Michigan 4C Association



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COORDINATED
CHILD CARE**

Statewide, there's just

One Call for Child Care
1-866-4CHILD CARE