



Home alone

Many parents wonder at what age it is safe to leave their children at home alone. Consider your child's age and maturity and their ability to cope in an emergency to help you decide.

In Queensland, it is illegal to leave a child under 12 years of age alone for 'an unreasonable time', depending on circumstances.

Things to consider

If your child is left alone without a carer, consider whether they are old enough to take action in an emergency. Ask yourself if they know what to do and where to get help. Do not leave infants, toddlers or young children alone under any circumstances.

How safe is your home?

Accidents happen quickly. A child can fall into a swimming pool, pull a saucepan off a stove, swallow dangerous objects or play with matches even when you are close at hand.

- If you are considering leaving your children at home alone, there's an even greater need to check that all dangers have been removed.

Are the rules clear?

Every family has its own rules. These rules may change according to whether you are there or if children are on their own.

- Ensure your child knows your house rules and any additional rules that apply when they are at home alone. For example, are they allowed to invite friends to visit, make themselves a hot drink or swim in your pool when home alone? Can they use the internet or run a bath?
- Remind your children of all the rules that apply, explaining why they are important and the consequences that will result if they break them.

How long will the child be home alone?

Will you be away from home for a few minutes, an hour, a morning or a full day?

- Consider how long you may be away, your children's capabilities and how they feel about being left alone.



When the time is right

When you feel your children have reached the right age and maturity, you've checked the safety of your home and tested your child on the ground rules, start small and grow the responsibility.

However, leaving your child home alone should be your last choice not your first. If you are putting someone else in charge of your child, think carefully about who is responsible enough to handle every possible circumstance.

- Check the safety of your home before leaving your child alone.
- Test your child on the ground rules and what to do in case of any trouble.
- Phone regularly to check on your child.
- If putting someone else in charge of your child, think carefully about who is responsible enough. Make sure the carer looking after your child can handle any emergency and knows where to get help.
- Check your child feels safe.

Most importantly, ensure your child feels comfortable being home alone and return home when you say you will.

Who are you leaving at home and who will be in charge?

If you are leaving older and younger children at home, is it reasonable to expect the older children to take responsibility for their younger siblings? An older child's lack of experience may make it difficult for them to safely and calmly care for the younger ones.

- If you do leave an older child in charge, make sure he or she is capable of handling any disagreements and enforcing the rules.
- Make sure the child knows what to do in an emergency and what to do if the other children become unwell.

Things your child should know

Before leaving your child alone, write down and explain:

- where you are going and when you'll be back
- how to get in contact with you
- your home telephone number and home address (explain that the police, fire and ambulance service will need to know where to go if contacted).

Talk to your child about:

- how to use the telephone, including how to dial 000 in an emergency
- where to find the telephone numbers of trusted friends or relatives
- what to do if the telephone rings
- what to do if someone knocks on the door
- what to do in case of fire
- how to use deadlocks
- how to judge if another child is unwell and needs help
- where to find the first aid kit and how to use it
- the family rules.

More information

The Queensland Government provides families with up-to-date information about approved early childhood education and care services in their local area, and has parent tip sheets on a range of topics.

To access the latest information or to find an early childhood education and care service call 13 QGOV* (13 74 68) or visit www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au.

For service ratings visit the MyChild website at www.mychild.gov.au or the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website at www.acecqa.gov.au.

Other languages

If you need an interpreter, phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Assistance making a call

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment:

- TTY users phone 133 677*, then ask for 13 74 68*.
- Speak-and-listen users should phone 1300 555 727*, then ask for 13 74 68*
- Internet relay users should connect to the National Relay Service at www.iprelay.com.au/call/index.aspx then ask for 13 74 68*.

Acknowledgement

The information in this publication was sourced from the Raising Children Network at www.raisingchildren.net.au

Disclaimer

This publication is offered as a guide and should not be considered an exhaustive statement on the subject.

**Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.*