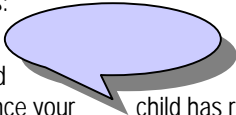




# Supervision Guidelines: *Is my child ready to be left alone?*

Every year, more than 3 million children between the ages of 6 and 12 are left home alone on a regular basis.

But are these children ready to be unsupervised? Virginia state statues do not set a specific age after which a child legally can stay alone. Age alone is not a very good indicator of a child's maturity level. Every child is different, maturing and developing life skills at very different ages. Even children in the same home are often ready at different ages! As a parent it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure the proper arrangements are made for your child(ren). You must always actively monitor your child(ren) and consistently reassess the arrangements on a daily basis. In determining whether a child is capable of being left alone and whether a parent is providing adequate supervision ask yourself the following questions:



## 1. What does the LAW say?

Cities and counties in Virginia each have different guidelines about how old a child may be to be left alone. Once your child has reached that particular age, it is not an automatic pass to leave them alone. In fact, Child Protective Services may be called about a situation involving children being left alone at any age. ***The law defines neglect, in part, as the failure to provide children with adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care and (the) supervision they need to be healthy and safe.*** If CPS is contacted they may assess the time of day and length of time the children are left home alone; the safety of the home or neighborhood; whether the parents have arranged for nearby adults to be available in case a problem arises; and whether or not there is a family history of child abuse and/or neglect.

## 2. Are YOU ready for the responsibility of leaving your child(ren) alone?

No matter where you or your children are, **YOU** are ultimately responsible for their health and well being.

*-Can you stay in touch with and supervise your child even if you are not at home?*

*-If not, will a trusted adult or nearby friend or relative be accessible by phone and able to help your child in case of an emergency?*

*-Do my children get along?*

*-Does my child get into trouble often?*

*-Is my child responsible enough?*

*-Can my child say "NO" to friends who might encourage him/her to break the rules?*

*-Does my child get scared easily?*

*-Is my child good at problem solving? Can he/she think of alternative solutions when confronted with a new situation?*

### Take the time to evaluate your child's development...

Discuss possible situations and ask "What if..." questions to see how your child will handle potential problems.

*Once you and your child have decided they are ready to be left home alone then you have some work to do! Consider...*

- Creating a "Safety Plan"
- Developing a phone and visitor plan
- Teaching your child basic "Survivor Skills"
- Establishing a Check-In Routine
- Preparing a list of Emergency Information
- Structuring your child's time

### Your child should be able to...

- ✓ be away from adults without feeling lonely or afraid
- ✓ handle the unexpected without getting upset
- ✓ be willing to follow important rules
- ✓ understand and remember instructions
- ✓ solve basic problems of being alone
- ✓ read and write well enough to take telephone messages
- ✓ find something to do when alone without getting into trouble
- ✓ ask for help from friends, neighbors and rescue squads
- ✓ understand the role of policemen, firefighters and rescue squads
- ✓ get along with other children and adults, especially if they will be home with a sibling

**A**s a parent it is important that you take responsibility for your actions as well. Let your child know what time to expect you home. If you are running late call your child(ren) to let them know and prepare them for what to do if you do not arrive home in time. It is also important to remember that a child who can take care of him/herself may not be ready to care for younger children. If your child cannot or does not carry out their responsibilities they may not be ready to stay home alone!

This handout was produced by the KING WILLIAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, 172 Courthouse Lane, King William, VA 23086 (804)-769-4905 and compiled from the following sources: SCAN of Northern Virginia- *Supervision Guidelines: Is my child ready to be left alone?* and *Parenting News* June-August 2006; Virginia Department of Social Services-CPS/Supervision Guidelines; and the Virginia Education Association/NEA "*Let's Talk About When Your Child Is Home Alone*".