



**HUMAN SERVICES**  
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## HOW OLD IS OLD ENOUGH TO BE LEFT HOME ALONE?

There is no magical age for parents to use as a guide for leaving their children home alone. Parents need to use their own good judgment and their knowledge of their children to determine when and at what age it is appropriate to leave them home alone. The ability to feel safe, handle emergencies and be a responsible/reliable child really varies from child to child.

Stevens County is using statewide established screening criteria to assist everyone in determining how old is old enough to be left home alone. This screening criteria asks parents to look at the following factors before allowing your child to be left home alone or to babysit for another child.

- Length of time.
- The maturity and intellectual level of the children.
- The accessibility of the parent, guardian, or other designated adult.
- The health or physical status of the children.
- The behavioral history of the children.
- Whether or not a child is using a stove, iron, or appliance, which poses a danger because of their age.
- Whether or not the parents have discussed an escape plan, held a fire drill, and discussed emergency safety procedures with the children.
- Whether or not the residence has an operational smoke detector.
- Whether or not there are unusual and/or dangerous hazards in the home.
- The children's reaction to being left alone.
- The ages and number of children in the home.
- Whether or not the child has completed a Babysitting Clinic.
- The reliability/capability of the person the parent has chosen to provide supervision.

**With consideration of the above factors, Stevens County uses the following guidelines for children who are unsupervised or provide supervision to younger children:**

- Children 7 years of age and younger should not be left alone for any period of time.
- Children 8 to 10 years of age should not be left alone for more than 3 hours.
- Children 11 to 13 years of age should not be left alone for more than 12 hours.
- Children ages 14 to 15 should not be left alone for more than 24 hours.
- Children ages 16 to 17 may be left alone for over 24 hours with a plan in place concerning how to respond to an emergency.
- A child under age 11 should not provide childcare.
- A child aged 11 to 13 years of age may baby-sit with the expectation that the parent, guardian or caretaker will be returning within 12 hours to supervise the children.
- An adolescent aged 14 to 15 can baby-sit for up to 24 hours as long as they can contact their parent, guardian or other responsible adult.
- An adolescent 16 year of age or older providing baby-sitting for younger children for more than 24 hours, must know the whereabouts of the parents, when they will return and have adult backup.

Sponsored by the Stevens County Child Protection Team