



Is your child or teen too young to be left alone?

When school is not in session, families have to think about childcare and the question often comes up concerning when can children stay home alone. The Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) has specific guidelines on when children and teens can be left at home alone.

DFCS policy states:

- Children under eight (8) years old should **never be** left home alone.
- Children ages of nine (9) to twelve (12) can be left home alone for **short periods of time** (up to 2 hours).
- Children ages thirteen (13) and older **can be** at home alone **for up to 12 hours** and act as a babysitter for younger children (children who are 12 years old and who display maturity also fall into this category).
- If your child has special needs, consider your child's ability to be safe at home alone even if they are old enough.

Parents need to educate children on safety when home alone; such as staying inside, not answering the door or using the stove. Also, parents should make sure their child has a way to call for help if needed, and a trusted adult is available for emergencies.