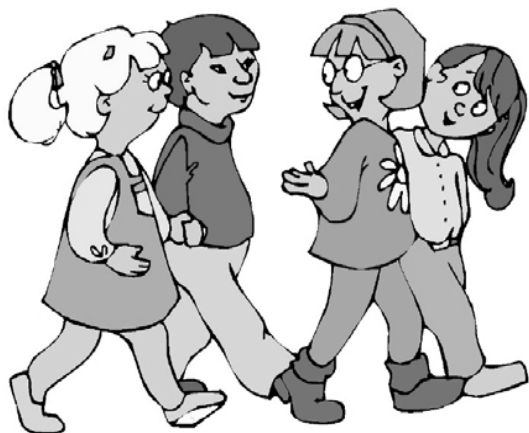


Can I leave my child alone?



Guidelines For Parents

**The Children's Aid Society
of the County of Simcoe
1-800-461-4236**



Common Questions

When can my child babysit?

- A child should be at least 12 years of age before they are permitted to care for younger children. A babysitting course for this child is also recommended.
- Parents are responsible to determine when an older child is ready to provide reliable care for younger children.
- When choosing a babysitter, there are many factors to consider. The person's maturity, abilities, reliability, past history and problem solving skills should be considered.

Should I leave my 9 1/2 year old child alone?

- A child under the age of 10 should not be left alone. Although you may have taught him/her what to do in certain situations, a child under 10 years just does not have the ability to make a judgment you can count on. The bottom line is he/she might do the right thing or he/she might not.

Can I leave my sleeping child in the car while I run into the store?

- A child under the age of 10 years should not be left alone. You may be longer than you think and anything can happen in that time. There is no magical number of minutes that a child can be left alone.

If your child walks to and from school, make sure there is a safety plan in place.

When should I contact the CAS?

- If you are experiencing the pressures of life and are afraid you may take it out on your children.
- If you are a victim of abuse or neglect.
- If illness, death, separation, drugs or alcohol are causing family breakdown.
- If you need assistance in planning regarding a pregnancy.
- If you suspect that a child may be in need of protection the law requires you to make a report to the CAS. This must be done without delay.

What happens when the CAS is called?

- When you call the CAS to report a concern, a trained social worker will determine if an investigation is needed and, if so, one will begin.
- If the investigation reveals a reason for CAS intervention, the family and child will be offered the appropriate services.
- It will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to prove that adequate arrangements were made to ensure their child's safety when left alone.



**To contact us:
The Children's Aid Society
of the County of Simcoe**

Phone 1-800-461-4236

Visit our website: www.simcoecas.com

You know your child best.

Can I leave my child alone? . . . Guidelines For Parents

These guidelines are written to help parents decide whether a child is old enough and responsible enough to be left alone. When making the decision, consider the following:

- Parents are responsible for their children until the age of 16.
- Children under the age of 10 years should not be left alone.
- Children under the age of 12 years should not be left alone to care for other children.

What does the law say about leaving children alone?

Child and Family Services Act 1999, R.S.O. 1990, C-C-11, as amended states the following:

- (3) No person having charge of a child less than 16 years of age shall leave the child without making provision for his or her supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances.

Where a person is charged with contravening subsection (3) and the child is less than 10 years of age, the onus of establishing that the person made provision for the child's supervision and care that was reasonable in the circumstances rests with the person.

What does this mean to parents?

In all cases, when determining whether or not to leave a child home alone, parents must consider:

- the child's age.
- the time of day and length of time the child will be alone.
- the location of the home.
- the child's comfort level with being left alone.
- the child's knowledge of emergency situations.
- if the child has taken a babysitting course.
- that periods of family stress such as separation, moving, or the death of a family member are not good times to begin leaving your child alone.

Measure your child's abilities

- Has the child demonstrated an ability to take care of herself or himself? Can he/she get dressed, find safe activities, remember and follow instructions, and be relied upon to care for property?
- Does the child demonstrate good judgement and have experience working out problems independently?
- Does the child have special needs that might make it difficult to perform tasks such as going to the washroom, calling for help, or getting out of the home in an emergency?
- Have any behavioural problems been identified by you, the school, or a doctor, that would pose a risk to the child if left alone? For example, children who have a history of self-harm, aggression, fire setting, wandering from home, destruction of property or an inability to concentrate and follow directions could pose a risk to themselves or others if they were unsupervised.
- If the child requires one-to-one help at school from a support worker or teaching assistant, it may not be wise to leave him/her alone at home without direct supervision.
- If you decide your child is old enough and responsible enough to be left alone, develop a



Teach your child:

- How to answer the telephone and the door
- Never to tell a caller/visitor that he or she is alone
- To hang up immediately if a caller becomes rude
- How to deal with a collect phone call (it may be you calling)
- How to call 9-1-1 or local emergency number
- How to take a message and how to leave a message
- Where to find important phone numbers
- Where and how to go for help

Safety hints for parents

To find out how much your child knows about what to do in specific situations, such as staying alone, play the "What if . . ." game.

Describe or act out (role play) things that could happen while your child is alone.

Ask the following questions:

- What if there is a fire?
- What if a stranger comes to the door with a parcel?
- What if you were really hungry?
- What if you were scared or hurt?
- What if the lights went out?
- What if you got locked out?

Your child's ability to handle these situations should help you decide if he or she is old enough and responsible enough to be left alone.

Remember, it is **always** up to you to ensure your child's care and safety

Increase your child's
responsibilities gradually and
monitor his/her progress
