



Child Care Hot Topics

Topic 8: How old is old enough to be left alone?

Hello Child Care Providers,

With the summer winding down and the uncertainty of the plan for the school year, may make it challenging for many families to figure out childcare. Families may need to juggle working from home some days and others from the office, so if schools switch to distance learning they may wonder what they will do for childcare? You may be asked by your clients, family members or friends some questions around the topic – How old is old enough to be left alone? Scott County wants to be a resource to you and the families of the county to help figure this out, as we are all in this together. If you or a family you have contact with have questions about this, please feel free to reach out to the agency for information at 952-445-7751.

We know you take the wellbeing of children seriously so want to provide you with the guidelines Scott County uses when screening if a child could be left alone.

-- Child Care Licensing Team

Guidelines for children who are unsupervised or who provide supervision to young children -

- Children age 7 and younger **always** need appropriate supervision.
- Children ages 8-10 may be left alone for only short periods of time.
- It may be acceptable for children age 11 to babysit for short periods of time.
- It may be acceptable for children 12-13 to be unsupervised or to babysit with the expectation that the caregiver will be returning within 12 hours.

Scott County uses a statewide established screening guide to help decide how old is old enough to be left home alone. This guide asks parent to look at the following factors before allowing your child to be left home alone or to babysit for another child-

- How long will they be left alone?
- What is the maturity and intellectual level of the children?
- Is there another adult available to the child if they need help?
- What is the health and physical status of the children?
- Does the child have any behaviors?
- Will the child use any appliances which could be dangerous?
- Have the parents discussed an escape plan, held a fire drill and discussed safety procedures with the children?
- Does the residence have an operational smoke detector?
- Are there unusual and/or dangerous hazards in or around the home?
- How does the child feel about being left alone?
- What are the ages and number of children in the home?
- Has the child completed a Babysitting Class?
- Is the person the parent has chosen to provide supervision reliable/capable?

There is no magical age for parents to use as to when it is safe to leave their children home alone. Parents need to use their own good judgement 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 is different from child to child.

If you have concerns about a child that is left home alone or you still have questions about when it is appropriate for a child to be left home alone, please feel call 952-445-7751 and ask to speak to our child protection intake.