

Family Keys

Self-Care Resources for Children & Their Families

Ready for Self-Care?

1 KEY

At some point during each child's development, families start to think about letting children supervise themselves. Self-care can be a rewarding

experience for children who are ready for it.

It can help them develop independence, responsibility and self-confidence. But if a child is not ready, self-care can be frightening and dangerous.

There is no magic age at which children develop the maturity and good sense needed to stay alone. But there are some signs that show a child may be ready.



For Parents

Key 1 asks three important questions to help parents decide when a child is ready:

1. How safe are your house or apartment and neighborhood?
2. Do you think your child is ready?
3. Does your child think he or she is ready?

You must also ask yourself whether you are ready.

Are you ready?

Some signs that your child is ready for self-care:

- ▼ Your child indicates desire and willingness to stay alone.
- ▼ Your child accepts responsibility and makes decisions. For example, your child will follow your written directions for chores that need to be done while you are away.
- ▼ Your child shows awareness of what others need.

For many children, these abilities can appear between 9 to 12 years of age. Other children need more time.

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Family Activities

How safe are your house or apartment and neighborhood?

Can you answer yes to all seven questions?

Check ✓

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

1. Are the furnace, fireplace, chimney and electrical wiring in safe working condition?
2. Does your home have smoke detectors that work, and do children know what they sound like?
3. Are firearms locked, and chemicals, matches and poisons put away where children cannot get them?
4. Are children safe when walking home from school alone?
5. Can you trust the other children in the neighborhood?
6. Is there a telephone in the home?
7. Can the doors and windows be locked?

Are at least two of the following **support options** available?

Check ✓

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

8. Can the child call a parent if necessary?
9. Are trusted adult friends nearby to call in an emergency?
10. Is there a telephone reassurance line to call for advice or help?
11. Does your neighborhood have a Safe Watch or Block Parent program?

If you answered yes to all of the first seven questions, and at least two **support options** are available (from questions 8 to 11), you may want to try self-care.

How to Begin

Start with short periods of time – only one or two days a week, if possible. Then set up a trial period of a week or two to try self-care and see how it works. That takes some pressure off the child. It also ensures that you talk about how self-care is going, and change the arrangement if need be.

Are you ready?

When your parents agree that you may try self-care, they are showing they think you are growing up and responsible. They probably will want to try self-care for a while to see how you do. By talking with your parents about your feelings, you can help tell whether the time is right for self-care.



Answer these questions.

Check ✓

- Yes No 1. Are you sometimes afraid to be alone in the house during the day?
- Yes No 2. Are you sometimes afraid to be alone in the house after dark?
- Yes No 3. Are there activities that you would miss out on if you go home alone after school?
- Yes No 4. Is there someone in your neighborhood who would make you feel afraid if you were home alone?
- Yes No 5. Do you know someone in your neighborhood who would help you if you had an emergency while home alone?
- Yes No 6. Can you do your school work if you are home alone?

If you answered **no** to the first four questions, and **yes** to questions 5 and 6, you are probably ready to start thinking about what self-care would be like:

What household chores would you do if you were home alone?

Are any of your friends in self-care?

What problems do they have?

What would you do for fun if you were home alone?

What do your friends say they like about self-care?

For parents: **►**
 Are you ready?
continued from page 1

KEY

Ready for Self-Care? asks a lot of questions. Most families have some "yeses," some "nos" and some "maybes." Most important is that you talk about self-care and decide together if you and your child are ready. Other *Family Keys* help prepare children for self-care – rules, phone skills, first aid, fire safety, personal safety, coping with fear, loneliness and boredom, getting along with brothers and sisters, kitchen and food safety, nutrition, and building self-confidence and family strengths.

Can you answer yes to these questions?

Check ✓

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 1. Do you feel your child is mature enough to handle the responsibilities of being alone? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 2. Do you and your child communicate well about feelings? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 3. Can you trust your child to tell you if something goes wrong in self-care? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 4. Does your child follow family rules and directions well? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 5. Does your child show resourcefulness by being able to find something useful and interesting to do? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 6. Have you talked with your child about self-care? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 7. Is your child interested in self-care? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 8. Is your child confident about self-care? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 9. Have you prepared your child and home for self-care? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 10. Can you reach your child by phone and monitor a self-care trial situation? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 11. Are you reliable? Do you come home on time? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 12. Can you be reached in an emergency? |

If you answered mostly yes, you will probably want to read pages 2 and 3. If you answered mostly no, you may want to put these materials away for a later time, and continue to provide direct supervision for your child for now.

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