

# Our advice on leaving a child at home

- Babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone
- Children under the age of 12 are rarely mature enough to cope in an emergency and should not be left at home alone for a long period of time
- Children under the age of 16 should not be left alone overnight
- Parents and carers can be prosecuted for neglect if it is judged that they placed a child at risk by leaving them at home alone
- A child should never be left at home alone if they do not feel comfortable with this, regardless of their age
- If a child has additional needs, these should be considered when leaving them at home alone or with an older sibling
- When leaving a younger child with an older sibling think about what may happen if they were to have a falling out - would they both be safe?

# Things to consider before leaving a child home alone

No one knows your child quite as well as you do – so use your knowledge of what they're really like to answer these questions. This won't give you a definite answer about whether the time is right to leave your child alone at home, but it'll certainly give you plenty to think about.

- Does your child seem to be responsible and mature for their age and always do what you tell him or her?
- Would they be able to fix themselves something to eat and drink and would you be happy with them using the cooker or microwave?
- Can you imagine how they'd cope in an emergency like a power cut or a flooded bathroom?
- Would they know what to do if the phone rang or someone came to the door?
- Would they know how to contact you or another family member or friend if they needed to? Do they have these contact numbers to hand?
- How would they feel about being left alone – pleased to be given the responsibility or scared by the thought of it?

But remember, if you or your child are even the teeniest bit unsure about leaving them at home on their own, it's always best to be on the safe side and arrange some other kind of care for them such as a babysitter or childminder.

# Choosing the right babysitter for you

Sometimes it might just be better to arrange for someone to stay with your child instead of leaving them home alone.

You and your child will probably like it best if it's someone they know already but you should think carefully about leaving an older brother or sister in charge. After all, if they fall out – and no matter how close siblings are most of the time there's always the chance of an argument – you won't be around to make the peace.

Plus, you need to be confident that your older child will be comfortable with the responsibility you're giving them.

If there isn't a suitable family member or friend who can help out then you could arrange a babysitter. If you do, here are some tips to help.



## Tips for choosing a babysitter

- There's no legal age to babysit but you should really think carefully about using anyone under 16. Any younger and they might not be mature enough – or have the authority – to be in charge.
- If they're looking after more than one child or a child with complex needs, think about if they're able to handle this
- Ask them how they'd deal with situations like your child refusing to go to bed.
- Get them together with your child and see whether they hit it off well – and afterwards ask your child how they feel about the sitter.
- Ask the babysitter if they've looked after children often and whether they'd mind you speaking to other people they sit for.
- Remember, there's nothing quite like a parent's intuition. So if you've got any doubts at all about a possible babysitter it's always best to find someone else.