

(August 2020)



## One Minute Guide



### When can you leave a child at home?

The law doesn't say an age when you can leave a child on their own, but it's an offence to leave a child alone if it places them at risk. Use your judgement on how mature your child is before you decide to leave them alone, e.g. at home or in a car.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) says:

- Children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone for a long period of time
- Children under 16 shouldn't be left alone overnight
- Babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone

**Parents can be prosecuted if they leave a child unsupervised 'in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health'.** Under the Children and Young Persons (England and Wales) Act 1933, the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937 and the Children and Young Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1968, parents and carers can be prosecuted for neglect. This means that they can be fined or sent to prison if they are judged to have placed a child at risk of harm by leaving them at home alone, regardless of where in the UK the child lives.

### Advice for leaving a child at home?

Whether you or your child are comfortable with the idea will often depend on how mature and adaptable your child is.

The advice below is there to help you make up your mind about whether leaving your child home alone is a good idea, as well as tips for choosing appropriate childcare if you decide it's not.

### Key points and questions to consider

- **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
- Talk to your child about how they feel being left alone and think about if there's anyone who might be able to check up on them. 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 (e.g. medication, toileting, etc.). You shouldn't leave them on their own.** Think about childcare or leaving them at home with an older sibling or family member.
- 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?**
- Making sure your **child knows what time you'll be home and where you're going** can help put their mind at ease
- Think about whether **they know what to do if the unexpected happens**
- **Do they know who and how contact you** or another family member or friend if they needed to?
- If your child is over 16 and you think they're ready to be left alone overnight, **let them know exactly where you are and how they can get in contact if anything goes wrong.** Talk about who they'll invite over while you're away for however long and make some ground rules

**Remember:** As well as putting your child in danger, 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.

This One Minute Guide has been adapted from information from the NSPCC. Further guidance is available from the [NSPCC Website](#).