



Lepage Associates  
*Solution-Based Psychological Services*

### ASK THE EXPERT

By: Lepage Associates' Staff Psychologist

**Q:** "What is an appropriate age to leave your child home alone, and how long should you start initially leaving them alone?"

**A:** Most states do not have regulations or laws about when a child is considered old enough to care for him/herself or to care for other children. Currently, the few states that do have guidelines or recommendations state anywhere from age 8 to age 12 as appropriate. According to Child Protective Services (CPS) of Wake County, there is no written guideline as to what age is appropriate for a child to be left at home in North Carolina. CPS did state that due to fire regulations, a child under the age of 8 is not to be left alone in a dwelling.

However, the decision is generally left to parents to make on an individual basis. Parents are reminded to consider the following before leaving a child alone:

- How mature is this child?
- How long will the child be left alone?
- What does the child have access to in the home that might be dangerous?
- Does the child know what to do in case of an emergency?

If you feel comfortable leaving your child alone after answering the questions above, it is typically best to start with a short period of time, such as an hour, and increase the time from there as you feel comfortable. Make sure children always have a list of phone numbers to call in case of an emergency.

For more information, parents may download helpful fact sheets and checklists from the following websites:

- 1) [www.girlsandboystown.org/parents/tips/kidsalone.asp](http://www.girlsandboystown.org/parents/tips/kidsalone.asp)
- 2) [www.childcareaware.org/en/dailyparent/0399/](http://www.childcareaware.org/en/dailyparent/0399/)
- 3) [www.nccc.org/SACC/sac42\\_old.enough.html](http://www.nccc.org/SACC/sac42_old.enough.html)

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Lepage Associates is a family practice serving children, teenagers, and adults; we provide therapy, evaluation, and consultation. Please visit our website, or call us for a free consult:

[www.lepageassociates.com](http://www.lepageassociates.com)

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