



**Beth W. Duncan**  
Director

**Department of Social Services**

**Samuel R. Frazier**  
Board Chair

**PRESS RELEASE: September 2017**

**“Leaving your child home alone. What’s the right thing to do?”**

Social Workers at Randolph County Department of Social Services often receive the question: “At what age can I legally leave my child home alone?” That question often comes either at the beginning, or end, of a new school year. It is understood that most parents will eventually face the decision to leave their child home alone for the first time...whether they are just running to the store for a few minutes or working during after-school hours. Children face real risks when left unsupervised and leaving a young child unsupervised may be considered neglect. However, being trusted to stay home alone can be a positive experience for a child who is mature and well prepared. It can boost confidence and promote independence and responsibility.

This one question should be answered with many additional questions...and some planning. Parents should consider factors such as the child’s age, physical and mental abilities, and length of the parents’ absence. Also consider the home environment or any other combination of factors that could put the child at risk. Here are some key things to consider.

- **Age vs. maturity:** In NC there is no “legally” defined age when children are allowed to stay home alone. The question really is: “When is it okay to leave a child at home alone?” Children mature at different rates and maturity is more of a factor than age. Therefore, parents should consider the child’s physical and mental abilities to take care of themselves. Do they obey rules and make good decisions? Are they comfortable, or are they fearful, of being alone?
- **Circumstances:** When and how a child is left home alone can make a difference to his or her safety and success. How long will your child be alone? Is it during the day, evening or night? Is food in the home already prepared so the child does not need to use a stove? Do they know who, when, and how to get help during an emergency? What does the child consider an emergency? How many children are being left alone? Children who are ready to stay alone by themselves may not be ready to care for other children.
- **Safety Skills:** Does the child know where you are and how to contact you at all times? Does the child know how to lock or secure doors? Does the family have a safety plan and can the child follow it? Does the child know what to do if a visitor comes to the door? Does the child know the full names of their parents...as well as their own full names? Are there trusted adults nearby that can help in an emergency...or if the child becomes afraid?

Parents should consider having a trial period to see how it goes, establish some rules and write them down, discuss emergencies and check in while away. Don’t overdo it. Even a mature, responsible child should not be left home alone too much or for too long. Consider other options such as programs offered by schools, community centers, youth, or faith based organizations to help the child stay connected and involved.

**P.O. Box 3239 • Asheboro, North Carolina 27204**

[www.co.randolph.nc.us/dss/](http://www.co.randolph.nc.us/dss/)

**Serving by empowering, protecting, educating, and promoting stability.**