

SHAWANO COUNTY
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Shawano County Department of Human Services provides Equal Opportunity in employment and service delivery.

GUIDANCE FOR THE AGE AT WHICH A CHILD MAY BE LEFT HOME ALONE

I. The importance of wisely determining the age at which a child is old enough to stay home alone:

Allowing a child to stay home alone is a welcomed event for most parents. It can provide independence for both the parents and the child, as well as substantial child-care cost savings to the household.

However, this decision should not be made hastily as doing so may result in exposing the child to danger or injury, and can also expose a parent to possible child neglect charges.

As further noted below, determining the age at which a child can safely stay home alone depends upon many factors and must be made on a case-by-case basis.

II. State and National Guidelines:

Wisconsin is one of 35 states that has not created a statute establishing a mandatory or advisory minimum age at which a child may be left home alone.

There are 10 states that provide an advisory recommended age at which a child may stay home alone. These recommended ages range from a minimum of 6 years of age in Kansas, up to 12 years of age in Colorado, with the remaining 8 states falling in between.

The remaining 5 states do set forth a mandatory minimum age of from 8 years of age in Maryland and North Carolina, to 10 years of age in New Mexico and Oregon, up to 14 years of age in Illinois.

There is no federal law setting forth a mandatory minimum age, and different national organizations and agencies have differing opinions concerning a recommended age at which it is acceptable to leave a child at home alone.

III. Shawano County's Guidelines:

After reviewing state laws, state and national guidelines and other criteria, Shawano County advises as follows:

<i>Children age 9 and under:</i>	<i>Should never be left home alone for any period of time.</i>
<i>Children age 10 to 14:</i>	<i>May be left home alone for shorter reasonable periods of time depending on the answer to the questions below in Section IV of this Guidance and other factors applicable to the particular case.</i>
<i>Children 15 years of age and older:</i>	<i>May be left home alone for longer reasonable periods of time depending on the answer to the questions below in Section IV of this Guidance and other factors applicable to the particular case.</i>

IV. Questions to be addressed in each particular case:

As noted above in this Guidance, there is no definitive age at which all children may be left home alone, or for what time period. The decision in each particular case will depend upon the maturity of the child and other factors existing in that particular case.

In order to assist you in making the right decision, you may ask:

Is your child mentally ready to stay home alone, and does your child:

- Desire to stay home alone?
- Have the maturity and composure to respond appropriately to unexpected accidents, injuries, illness, threats and other occurrences?
- Know what to do in other emergencies such as power failures?
- Know when to call 911 and know how to make a report?
- Recognize potential danger in the home, outside the home, and with strangers?
- Know how to solve problems on their own, but also know when to get outside help?
- Know how to respond when the telephone or the doorbell rings?
- Handle responsibilities around the home effectively and trustworthily?

Is your child socially ready to stay at home alone, and does your child:

- Feel confident enough to ask another adult for help in case of a problem?
- Obey house rules and understand the consequences of violations of those rules?
- Find it easy to resist peer pressure?
- Solve conflicts with siblings, neighbors, and other children with minimal help from adults?

Does the particular occurrence lend itself to the child being able to stay home alone, and can you tell your child:

- How long you will be gone?
- Where you will be?
- That you will be able, reachable and available to respond to an emergency call if needed?
- That an adult back-up person will be able, reachable and available if you are not able to be contacted?
- Whether there are special considerations that can be addressed such as a child with disabilities, or a history of abuse or threats of abuse from other children in the household requiring adult supervision?

V. Application of Guidance:

As stated above, the information in this Guidance is not applicable to every case. Shawano County reserves the right to investigate, as needed, each matter on a case-by-case basis. Shawano County further reserves the right to deviate from this general Guidance depending upon the facts of each case.

If you have any questions or would like further information regarding this policy or guideline please contact the Shawano County Department of Human Services at 715-526-4700 and ask for the Intake Worker.

Vicki Heling
Youth Division Management