your local PTA, recreation department, or other community agency to establish a school-age child care program.

After you and your child have gone through the steps and you feel comfortable letting him stay home alone, set a trial period. Presenting it as a trial run lets your child know that he can choose not to continue if he is uncomfortable. It also allows parents to easily end the arrangement if they feel the child cannot handle the situation.

Children who are mentally and emotionally ready to stay alone and who know the skills and rules of the new responsibility can gain lots from the opportunity to care for themselves.

When you have a question, call or visit your local office of The University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service.

You’ll find a friendly, well-trained staff ready to help you with information, advice, and free publications covering agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development.

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Gale A. Buchanan, Dean & Director

The University of Georgia
Cooperative Extension Service
College of Family and Consumer Sciences
and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences cooperating
There is no magic age at which children become mature enough to stay home alone. However, there are some signs that show your child may be ready.

- **Being willing to or actually wanting to stay alone.** Ask your child how he feels about staying alone.

- **Being able to accept responsibility and make decisions on his own.** Children should be able to get ready for school on time, solve problems on their own, complete homework and chores without being reminded, and tell you where they are going and when they will be back.

- **Being able to discuss with you their interests and concerns.** If your child is mature enough to talk to you about important issues, he may be able to handle self-care. For many children this comes during the middle school years.

- **Being able to handle strangers on the telephone or at the door.** Make sure your child knows not to let callers know that her parents are not home and not to let strangers into the house.

Very few children younger than ten or 11 have the maturity to handle these tasks.

**Other things to consider:**

1. **Is your neighborhood safe?**
2. **Are there any responsible adults nearby?**
3. **How long will your child be alone?**

If you and your child agree to try self-care, provide your child with the knowledge and training needed. Below are some steps to a safer latchkey home.

**Steps to a safer latchkey home**

While a latchkey home is never as safe as one with a responsible adult, parents can provide a safer environment by following these tips.

- **Keys.** Have your child keep his or her housekeys hidden on a necklace or inside a pocket, purse, or wallet. Also leave an extra key with a trusted neighbor in case your child loses his or her key.

- **Schedule.** Establish a daily schedule so that your child knows what to do when he comes home.

- **Safety rules.** Write and post house safety rules regarding the use of appliances, answering the door and telephone, and play activities.

- **Emergency procedures.** Post emergency numbers and addresses on the phone. Make sure your child knows how to report emergencies. Practice emergency procedures and enroll your child in a community first aid or life skills class. Have your child memorize the phone numbers of at least two adults to contact in case of an emergency.

- **Check-in.** Establish a check-in routine so that a responsible adult knows when your child has arrived home. If your child can’t call you at work, he or she may need to check in with a neighbor.

- **Friends.** Generally, do not allow friends to visit your child when he or she is home alone. Their unsupervised play may get out of hand. Be sure to build time into your family routine for other social interaction opportunities.

- **Quality time.** Spend time with your child each day. Many children are fearful of staying alone and need an understanding adult to answer their questions and listen to their concerns.

- **Entertainment.** Provide some type of safe home entertainment. Hobbies, a home computer, a 4-H project, and simple chores are some ways to ensure that your child will not be bored after school. Consider using a filter on your home computer to limit inappropriate websites. Structure your child’s TV and telephone time.

- **Travel.** Do not allow your child to experiment with new routes to and from school. If possible, have your child walk to and from school with friends. Counsel him or her to come straight home.

- **Alternatives.** Keep looking for ways to provide adult supervised care. Work with