

**Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County recommends that you never leave children under the age of 10 at home alone.**

We also recommend that children not babysit until they are at least 12 years old. Even then, you need to consider whether the babysitter is mature enough.

Local information and resources:

- **Family and Children's Services:**  
519-824-2410 or  
1-800-265-8300
- **Guelph Police Service:**  
519-824-1212
- **OPP:** 1-800-310-1122
- **Kids Help Phone:**  
1-800-668-6868
- **[www.parentguide.ca](http://www.parentguide.ca)**

**The mission of F&CS** is to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to support and strengthen families. Together with the community, we work to develop respectful and caring environments in which all children can grow to their full potential.

**We envision** a community where all children are safe and healthy, nurtured in a permanent loving family and provided with opportunities to grow to their full potential.

**As an organization we value:** the safety and well-being of all children; the family as a foundation for children; caring communities; care of children in need; human dignity; service excellence; and organizational health.

**We are here** to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week with any child welfare concerns you may have. Call us during business hours to learn more about our service programs, adoption and foster care or volunteering.

**[www.fcsgw.org](http://www.fcsgw.org)**

**519-824-2410 or 1-800-265-8300**



**FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Welcome to our positive and anti-oppressive space, where every individual, regardless of age, is valued and respected whatever their culture, faith, ethnicity, race, ancestry, class, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

[www.fcsgw.org/positivespace](http://www.fcsgw.org/positivespace)



# GUIDELINES for supervising children

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**Working with Family and Children's Services  
Brochure 6 in a series**

## How old should children be before you leave them on their own, or before they can babysit?

### What the law says

The law in Ontario says parents must make “reasonable provision” for their children’s supervision and care. According to the law, a child is younger than 16. The law does not give a specific age when children can be left alone.

This pamphlet provides some guidelines to help you make reasonable arrangements for the care of your child.

### Parents need to think carefully

You need to consider carefully many factors when you choose a caregiver or when you decide a child can stay home alone or look after younger siblings. Different children are ready for this responsibility at different ages. Some things to consider:

- Is your child generally able to care for herself or himself? Can your child follow instructions? Does your child recognize safety hazards in the home or outside?
- Does your child show good judgement and problem solving skills?
- How does your child react in an emergency or when she or he has to make a quick decision?
- Does your child have special needs, such as impulsive or aggressive behaviour, anxiety, or a history of fire-setting or self harming, that would

make her or him more vulnerable if left alone?

- Would your child know how to intervene if younger siblings were misbehaving?

### When your child is ready to stay home alone

Talk with your child and make sure he or she:

- is comfortable being alone
- knows what to do in an emergency
- has your cell phone number
- has a person he or she can reach in an emergency – a neighbour or relative who can respond quickly

Set guidelines, such as whether friends can visit or whether your child can leave the home while you are away. Decide how often you will be checking in by phone.

### For how long should your child be alone?

Parents have to decide if it’s reasonable to leave a child home alone for a couple of hours after school or overnight. This depends on a number of things such as the child’s age, maturity, the safety plan that is in place and whether or not he or she will be looking after other children.

### We recommend these guidelines

Children under 5 need to be supervised all the time. Never leave them alone in a car, near water or with pets. Move safety hazards (such as matches, lighters, knives) out of reach.

- Children from 5 to 9 may be able to

play on their own. Younger children should be within sight or calling distance.

- When children are capable of playing on their own, you should make a plan with them about how far they can go, how often they are to check in and who is responsible for them.
- Never leave children under 10 at home alone.
- Do not let a child younger than 12 babysit. Even when over 12, make sure the child can handle the responsibility.

### Choosing a babysitter

Do you and your babysitter agree about how to discipline children – for example, not spanking, use of time-outs?

What do you know about the babysitter’s maturity level, impulsiveness, problem solving skills, frustration level, reliability, history?

If the babysitter is an older child, does he or she have a parent nearby to call in an emergency, or ready access to you?

Has the babysitter had experience with children or taken a babysitting course?

Does the babysitter have any behavioural or emotional problems or problems with drug or alcohol that would cause a risk to your child?

Is the babysitter mature enough to handle the length of time that he or she is going to be looking after your child?