The decision to leave a child home alone in self-care requires a careful evaluation of your child’s readiness and willingness to be alone at home, as well as the demands placed on him/her by the self-care situation. Unfortunately there is no magical age at which you can be sure your child will be safe at home. Some children do well in self-care for short periods at 9 or 10 years of age. Other children aren’t ready at age 12.

The following check-list has been reprinted with permission of Lynette and Thomas Long, authors of The Handbook for Latchkey Children and Their Parents. The checklist provides a good start in evaluating your child’s readiness for self-care.
SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Answer "YES" or "NO" to each of the following questions.

YES  NO

1) Do you consider your child old enough to assume self-care responsibilities?

2) Do you believe your child is mature enough to care for him or herself?

3) Has your child indicated that he or she would be willing to try self care?

4) Is your child able to solve problems?

5) Is your child able to communicate with adults?

6) Is your child able to complete daily tasks?

7) Is your child generally unafraid to be alone?

8) Is your child unafraid to enter your house alone?

9) Can your child unlock and lock the doors to your home unassisted?

10) Is there an adult living or working nearby that your child knows and can rely on in case of an emergency?

11) Do you have adequate household security?

12) Do you consider your neighborhood safe?

If you answered “NO” to any of the above questions, it is highly recommended that you delay or abandon plans to leave your child in self-care until positive responses can be given for all of the questions.
SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

Answer "YES" or "NO" to each of the following questions.

YES  NO

13) Has your child exhibited behaviors in the past that frightened you, such as:
   □  □  playing unsupervised with fire
   □  □  playing unsupervised with dangerous equipment
   □  □  experimenting with dangerous chemicals
   □  □  having unexplained seizures
   □  □  violent or aggressive behavior
   □  □  manifesting

14) Is your child without a telephone?
   □  □

15) While away from home, are you accessible by telephone?
   □  □

16) Is your child unable to use a phone?
   □  □

17) Is your child afraid of the dark?
   □  □

18) Does your child have a handicap that requires special supervision?
   □  □

19) Does your child have recurring nightmares or other serious sleep disturbances?
   □  □

If you answered “YES” to any question between 13 and 19, there is a strong possibility that you shouldn’t leave your child in self-care.
## SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

21) Is your child...

- 10 or older (1 point)
- 9-10 (2 points)
- 8-9 (3 points)
- 7-8 (4 points)
- 7 or younger (5 points)

22) How much time each day will your child be in self-care?

- 1 hour or less (1 point)
- 1-2 hours (2 points)
- 2-3 hours (3 points)
- 3-4 hours (4 points)
- 4 or more hours (5 points)

23) How much does your child spontaneously tell you about the events occurring in his or her life?

- everything (1 point)
- most things (2 points)
- some things (3 points)
- few things (4 points)
- nothing (5 points)

24) How close is the relationship between you and your child?

- close (1 point)
- very close (2 points)
- neither close nor distant (3 points)
- distant (4 points)
- very distant (5 points)

24) Will your child be home with younger siblings?

- 0-1 other (1 point)
- 2 others (2 points)
- 3 others (3 points)
- 4 others (4 points)
- 5 or more others (5 points)

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Add the number of points corresponding to your answers for questions 21 through 25. The lower your score, the better your child’s chance, and yours, of managing self-care. The range of possible points accumulated is from five to twenty-five. A score of ten or higher should cause you to be hesitant about starting your child in self-care.
For further information on evaluating and preparing children for self-care, additional resource are available from the Champaign and Urbana Public Library Children's Departments. These include books for parents considering self-care, activity books for children, fiction books for children focusing on children home alone, and films discussing self-care issues such as safety and constructive use of time.