

CHILDREN HOME ALONE

Virginia state statutes do not set a specific age after which a child legally can stay alone. * Age alone is not a very good indicator of a child's maturity level. Some very mature 10-year-olds may be ready for self care while some 15-year-olds may not be ready due to emotional problems or behavioral difficulties.

In determining whether a child is capable of being left alone and whether a parent is providing adequate supervision in latchkey situations, child protective services (CPS) will assess several areas. These areas include:

- **child's level of maturity.** CPS will want to assess whether the child **is physically capable** of taking care of himself; **is mentally capable** of recognizing and avoiding danger and making sound decisions; **is emotionally ready** to be alone; knows what to do and whom to call if an emergency arises; and has special physical, emotional, or behavioral problems that make it unwise to leave be left alone. **It is important to note that a child who can take care of him/herself may not be ready to care for younger children.**
- **accessibility of those responsible for the child.** CPS will want to determine the location and proximity of the parents, whether they can be reached by phone and can get home quickly if needed, and whether the child knows the parents' location and how to reach them.
- **the situation.** CPS will want to assess the time of day and length of time the children are left alone; the safety of the home or neighborhood; whether the parents have arranged for nearby adults to be available in case a problem arises; and whether there is a family history of child abuse or neglect.

* Some localities have ordinances concerning the age at which a child may be left without supervision.