

HOME ALONE

Tips & tricks



NZDSA
resources

A guide on when you could be letting your teen stay home alone.

HOME ALONE

When to allow your son/daughter to stay home alone can be a difficult question and it has added complications when the person has Down syndrome. This is, however, a usual stage of developing independence and there may come a time when your teenager starts pleading with you to let them stay at home without someone to look after them. It also becomes more of an issue in secondary school, when the option of outside school hours care is no longer available.

When the time is right?

Age and maturity will make a difference. For example, some parents may feel confident with their young person who is very responsible while others feel quite worried about an older son/daughter who may try to take risks. Letting go of the reins to allow your son/daughter a growing sense of responsibility and independence may need to be gradual. It may be a good time to start with short periods of time and, if all goes well, the length of time can increase in the future.

There is a role for your son/daughter in choosing when the time is right to be home alone - they may not be comfortable with the idea and may choose to stay with friends or grandparents rather than be on their own. The fact that parents are legally required to provide safety and supervision for their children also needs to be considered.

Questions to ask yourself:

Is my child developmentally ready to assume this responsibility?

All young people need to be well prepared. When the person has Down syndrome, parents may need to think more carefully about what their son/daughter needs to know and be able to do.

How safe is our home?

Accidents happen quickly. There is a greater need to check potentially dangerous things if you are not going to be there.

Are the ground rules clear?

Be precise about what your son/ daughter can and can't do. These rules may be different when you are away e.g. making a hot drink, using the toaster. Write the rules and put them in a central place (e.g. on the fridge)

Do not assume your child knows the reason for the rules. Ask them to tell you what the rules are.

How long will I be away?

How long you are away will make a difference to your planning. Am I sure my son/daughter knows:

- Where I am going
- When I will be back
- How to get in contact with me
- Their own telephone number and home address
- How to use the emergency number 111
- The telephone numbers of trusted friends/ neighbours
- Should they answer the phone if it rings?
- What to do if someone rings the doorbell
- What to do in case of fire
- How to use the deadlocks
- Areas of the house that are "off limits"
- If friends are allowed.

Being prepared

- Have telephone numbers clearly displayed near the phone
- Have emergency numbers saved on speed dial in your child's mobile phone
- Practice using the phone
- Have your address displayed near the phone
- Have rules written out (with pictures and photos if necessary) and displayed in a central place
- Use photos and stories to rehearse what to do in an emergency or if the phone/ doorbell rings
- Role play what to do in an emergency or if the phone/ doorbell rings
- Plan together what your son/ daughter will do while you are away.

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Want to know more?

The NZ Down Syndrome website can provide more information and link you to many more articles and organisations.

www.nzdsa.org.nz



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