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Many Canadian children nowadays stay home alone for short periods of time until a parent returns from work. This is a reality of our modern day society. For parents it can be a very difficult decision to leave children at home without adult supervision. However, a common sense approach, good preparation and a clear understanding by all of the expectations for children and adults can help families get ready for this important step towards independence.

Parents and guardians are responsible for the safety and well-being of their children and need to make reasonable provisions to ensure a safe and nurturing environment. Some suggestions for creating a safe environment include:

Provide a safe and secure home

Keep in touch by phone, pager or text messaging.

Establish clear rules and expectations.

Make sure your child stays occupied with appropriate activities.

Prepare your child to deal with real-life situations and emergencies.

Limit the amount of time children are left alone

Children need to feel confident that they can reach a competent adult at all times when left unsupervised. Many parents and guardians request "home alone" courses for their children, says Velma Ganassini, Program Co-ordinator for Ontario-based SOS First Aid and Safety Training. "The Home Alone course with First Aid helps to prepare children with knowledge and skills to stay safe and be responsible when home alone for short periods of time," says Ganassini, "and children are often more willing to listen to "the safety message"™ from a teacher or adult who is not a parent."

The popular course focuses on safety in and out of the home, injury prevention, how to handle real-life situations and provide basic first aid. SOS First Aid offers the Home Alone with First Aid course for children in the Ontario communities of Mississauga, Georgetown, Oakville, Burlington, Hamilton, Toronto and surrounding areas. SOS First Aid delivers an interactive program that makes learning a serious message fun and ideal for children aged 9 to 12. For more information, please visit [www.sosfirstaid.ca](http://www.sosfirstaid.ca).

In Ontario, there is no legal or specific age at which a child can be left unattended. However, it is not recommended to leave a child under the age of 10 without adult supervision. Parents should never force a child who is not ready or willing to stay at home alone. Use common sense and take the necessary time it takes to prepare the family for this important step of independence.

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