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# BABYSITTING

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**Q**

**A Mother has an 11-year who is in 1<sup>st</sup> year at school, who wants to be left home alone, when the Mother is out shopping, where does the Mother stand on this?**

**A**

This is a question Parents Advice Centre is asked quite often. Young children should never be left alone. It could be a very frightening experience and put them at risk.

As children get older many want to assert their independence by being allowed to stay at home by themselves. The pros and cons of doing so need to be weighed up considering the age and maturity of the child.

It is impossible to predict whether or not anything might happen when the child is alone which could cause them distress or put them in danger, so every effort should be made to gauge if the child is ready.

The whole issue of babysitting is very complicated and therefore it would be advisable to check with either the Children's Law Centre or your local advice centre for more information. The following are just guidelines which may help:

- The law does not state an age at which young people can babysit. You have to be at least old enough to work part time (13 years) before you can babysit.
- The law does not state the youngest age at which a child should be left with a babysitter.
- If children are left with a babysitter it is important for parents to remember that no one under the age of 16 can be charged with neglect or ill treatment of a child left in their care. Therefore parents remain responsible and may be charged themselves should any harm come to their child.
- Some large children's charities such as NSPCC recommend that babysitters should be at least 16.
- It is essential that if a young person is on their own they need to be well prepared for any eventuality, which may arise. Do try to think of the dangers, which could put the child at risk or frighten them.
- Make sure that the child is content about being on their own and that they have contact details of nearest trusted person should they need help.

