

“When Mummy goes out, I lock the door from the inside....she calls in the letterbox to say goodbye. I leave the lights on in case anyone tries to get in. Mummy usually comes home in the night when I am asleep.”

Common sense and the law

If a child is not ready to be left alone, they can feel sad, lonely, frightened and it can be dangerous. There are many possible risks, both physical and emotional, which could affect your child in a bad way. It is not possible to rely on a child to let you know how much care they need. They may say that they do not mind being left, and may find it fun at first, but they cannot fully know the possible risks and how to handle them.

Even ordinary things that happen in life, such as hunger, a storm, the phone ringing or someone coming to the front door can cause problems. An accident, feeling ill or a powercut may occur, and these are not things that a child would know how to deal with.

It is never possible to leave your child and assume that someone will look out for them, unless you have already spoken to a trusted friend or neighbour and specifically asked them to keep an eye out.

If they are told, the Police or Social Services may take action if they think that a child has been neglected by being left alone. Neglect happens when a parent or carer does not meet the children’s basic needs of food, shelter, security, attention or protection from danger.

The NSPCC have issued guidelines advising that children under the age of 13 should not be left alone. While this is not the law, it is suggested as good practice. Children under 13 years of age cannot manage the responsibility of being left alone and this may be particularly so if they have a disability.

As a young person grows older, leaving them alone after school, for an evening or during the day is less worrying, as long as they know what to do if they are worried or need anything. So preparation is vital. If your child is 13 or over and you feel he or she has the understanding to deal with this, it is important that they know where you are and who to contact in an emergency.



Warning Signs:

Parents who have little support.
 A child who is often seen outside and all alone for long periods of time.
 Childcare arrangements that keep going wrong.



Action:

If there is immediate risk of harm to a child, call the police on 999.



What to say:

If you are worried about a child being left alone, talk to the parent, a Health Visitor, Teacher or a Social Worker.



Prevention:

Think about shared babysitting and chat to neighbours, friends or other parents.
 Find out about After School Clubs and Holiday Play Schemes.

Contacts:

Buckinghamshire County Council First Response Team: 0845 4600001

Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Team: 0800 999 7677

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

Gingerbread - a charity for single parents': 0808 802 0925 www.gingerbread.org.uk