

From the Office of the Sheriff: "Home Alone"

All of us have watched the Home Alone series, a collection of comedy's based on an 8-year old boy left home alone by his parents. The boy, Kevin McCallister, played by Macaulay Culkin seemed well beyond the age of eight when it came to defending him self from ruthless burglars. I am not sure how many eight-year olds could match the performance, it was of course – a movie.

The topic arose just last week when I received an email from a parent seeking information as to what the appropriate age is for kids to babysit others or at what age they can be left home alone. I welcomed the question as it made me think about my younger years and at what age my parents allowed me to babysit my brothers and when I was allowed to stay home alone.

I remember babysitting cousins as a teenager. I also remember staying home alone at the age of 12 as my family went to our Beaver Dam Lake home for the weekend. I had to stay behind to do my Saturday paper route. I guess it all came down to the level of confidence my parents had in me, how long they would be away and how far away they would be, to include time of day.

I replied to man that I have no hard and firm answer. I suggested a few things for him to contemplate. First and foremost, how responsible is the child in question? Not all children of the same age exhibit the same level of maturity. If your child is babysitting your other children and you worry enough to call home 3-4 times while you away it would tell me you yourself may be unsure of your descision. Ask yourself what your standards are for someone else's child to babysit your children, the standards should be similar. Has the child attended one of the babysitting clinics or programs offered to teach sitters do's and don't's? Bottom line - Do you trust the babysitter with your childrens lives?

Leaving children home alone. Whether it is a quick run to the grocery store, dentist appointment, or a quick visit with friends we, as parents, must be sure we have the confidence in our children they do the right things. We must have comlete trust in them. Do they know what to do if there is a fire? Another child chocking? What do they do should a stranger ring the door bell? Are your children afraid to tell you they are too afraid to stay home alone, even for a short period of time. There are many variables we must look at, time of day, length of time, number of kids to watch.

We do respond to the occassional call from an anomonus caller regarding children home alone. Most often we summon the parent or guardian back home. Most of our descision making is based upon the maturity, level of reasoning, and confidence the children have. Those factors, coupled with time of day, ability to contact parents, and distance they are away from the home determine whether or not social services is contacted.

I don't have the right answer. I do know that our children are our lives and everything we live for and we would never forgive ourselves should something bad happen. So ensure they have your cell phone numbers and those of grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Secure guns and weapons, prescription medication, and other hazards. Question your kids and babysitter on how they would react to certain situaitons, fire, stranger at the door, chocking or out of control child. We owe this to our children. Thanks for listenning, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.