



THE HALTON CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY GUIDELINES FOR:

LEAVING YOUR CHILD ALONE OR BABYSITTING

In Partnership with families and the community, the Halton Children's Aid Society's mission is to protect children and enable them to grow and realize their potential within a safe and nurturing environment.

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At What Age Can a Child be Left Home Alone?

Contrary to most peoples' perception, there is not specific age at which a child can be left unattended. The Child and Family Services Act states that parents of children under the age of 16 years, must make "reasonable provisions" for their care. This requires parents to ensure that if they leave their children at home alone, that they have made appropriate efforts to ensure their children's safety. This must go hand in hand with a common sense approach, for instance, ensuring children have emergency phone numbers, are mature and responsible and are not left for long periods of time without adult supervision.

CAS strongly suggests parents not to leave a child under the age of ten (10) alone. If the child is under the age of ten (10) and CAS intervenes, the onus is on the parent to provide reasons and rationale to CAS that their child has not been left in a potentially harmful situation.

In addition, the Criminal Code of Canada includes the offence of abandoning a child. Everyone who unlawfully abandons or exposes a child who is under the age of 10 years, so that his/her life is or is likely to be endangered, or his/her health is

or is likely to be permanently injured, is guilty of an offence that carries a penalty of imprisonment of not more than two (2) years.

At What Age Can a Child Babysit Another Child?

Choosing a suitable babysitter is a very important decision.

Again, this requires a common sense approach. Not all children are responsible enough by the age of 12 years, for instance, to babysit other children. It is important to know that there is no age specified by law for babysitting. It is a matter of the parent determining if a teenager is responsible enough to provide a safe environment for their younger children.

Consideration should be given as to whether the babysitter has taken a certified babysitting course, has previous babysitting experience with positive references and appears to have a good rapport with their younger child. It is important that younger babysitters are not used for lengthy periods of time.

Selecting a person to leave in charge of your child's care is a very serious and important task for parents.

This list of guidelines will assist parents in selecting and training a suitable candidate for babysitting.

Selection Guidelines:

Age should not always be the determining factor. Although the minimum age recommended by Halton CAS and Halton Community Standards for a babysitter is 12, not every 12 year old or teenager is mature enough to care for a baby or a child. Take the time to get to know the prospective babysitter and use your discretion to determine if they seem to have a strong sense of responsibility to care of your child.

Has the sitter taken a babysitting course or First Aid? Courses are available from Red Cross, St. John's Ambulance, Parks and Recreation and the Board of Education.

Reference checks are important. Even if you know the potential babysitter well, do not hesitate to contact other parents who have used his or her services. Even though the sitter may be a wonderful neighbour, he or she may not have the skills or maturity to look after children.

Older siblings are not always the best candidates for babysitting a younger child. Some may resent the expectation placed on them to provide care for the younger child.

Parents should ensure that they are making supervision decisions with their child's best interest and safety in mind, not for financial or convenience reasons.

Training

Have a safety plan. Ensure the babysitter knows how to call 9-1-1 and that he or she knows the address of your home and the major cross-streets. The sitter should also know how to reach you while you are gone (phone number, cell phone, pager) and they should also know which neighbour they can rely on in an emergency.

Since a fire can start in minutes, the sitter should also know a fire safety evacuation plan regardless of the length of time parents will be away.

Start your babysitter with short time intervals to gear up for a longer night out. This will help you and the sitter build confidence.

After returning at the end of the babysitter's shift, pay attention to the types of things the sitter comments on. Did he or she hit on points of concern that a parent would notice such as if the child ate, did the child seem sad, happy, anxious, did they spend time together reading, colouring, etc.

After the sitter has left, talk to your child about his or her experience. Some questions you may want to ask include: What activities did they do together? Did the child like the babysitter?

Parents are responsible for the safety and well-being of their children.

Parents will be held accountable by CAS and Police if there has been an injury or risk to their child if the child has been left alone or in the care of another person under the age of 16 years.

