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Big Kid

### Back to School Guide - Middle & High School



## Latchkey: 3 Signs Your Kid Is Ready

Posted by [Jeanne Sager](#) on September 3, 2010 at 3:45 PM

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The first time my parents left me home alone, they were gone for a few minutes.

It felt like hours.

It turns out your kid who is chomping at the bit to be left home alone isn't always ready for it.

So how do you know when it's safe to let them loose as a latchkey kid?

1. **Check With the Cops.** Local laws vary, but some cities and towns have a minimum age. Don't even consider latchkey until you learn the law (remember, ignorance is no defense).

2. **Gauge How Comfortable They Are.** It doesn't matter if you're ready -- *they* have to be ready.

"If your kid doesn't seem ready at 14, don't do it. And don't start any younger than 11," says Dr. Charlotte Reznick, an associate professor of psychology at UCLA and author of *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety Into Joy and Success*. "A lot of kids are uncomfortable being alone," she says. "That desire for independence really doesn't come until the teenage years."

3. **Watch Them in Tough Situations.** A child who can't handle minor emergencies when you're home will never be able to grab a fire extinguisher when the toast lights. Waiting until kids are older can make a difference there.

"At 12 more of those brain cells kick in that help your kids make good decisions," Reznick advises.

**Are you doing latchkey with your kids this school year?**

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