

In Georgia, child maltreatment can include children who are left unsupervised for long periods of time. Like most states, Georgia does not have regulations or laws to determine when a child is considered old enough to be left unsupervised or to supervise other children. However, there are state guidelines administered through the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) to evaluate situations and determine if a child neglect investigation is warranted. DFCS encourages parents to use sound judgment and assess the maturity and responsibility of their children before deciding whether to leave them home alone.

The most important consideration is whether a child is old enough and responsible enough to be left alone in a manner that ensures a healthy and safe environment.

**Georgia's guidelines for leaving a child without adult supervision include the following:**

- Children under 8 years old should never be left alone, even for short periods of time.
- Children between the ages of 9 and 12, based on level of maturity, can be left home alone for brief periods of time.
- Children 13 and older can generally be left as babysitters, with the exception of children in foster care. However, it is not recommended that 13-year-olds baby sit infants, small children or children requiring special attention due to medical conditions.
- Children 15 and older can be left home alone overnight, depending on their level of maturity.

**Other safety guidelines for children include:**

- Don't leave a child responsible for food preparation that involves the stove.
- Even with children who are old enough to be left alone, make a safety plan that includes 911 and rehearse it with your child. Also arrange for neighbors or friends to check in with your child during the time he or she is unsupervised.
- Always make sure you know where your small child is. Double check your vehicle when you leave it. Check your driveway before backing your vehicle into the street.
- Do not leave your small child unattended in shopping malls or other public places, including gas stations, even for a moment.