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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Assessing Your Child's Readiness for Self-Care¹

Diana Converse²

I remember the moment I had to leave each of my children on their own for the first time like it was yesterday. I also remember struggling with whether they were too young, while it seemed many of their peers' parents had made that decision long before. Who was right?

As it turns out, perhaps we all were." Just like potty-training, some children can be ready at an earlier age, some take a little longer...but eventually, they are all potty-trained," and they will have to take care of themselves as part of their maturing process.

Self-care can be a positive and rewarding experience for children who are ready for it and are properly prepared. It can help them develop independence and learn responsibility. It can give them confidence in their own abilities. However, if a child is not mature enough, self-care can create anxiety and can be potentially dangerous.

While there is no magic age when children develop the maturity needed to stay alone, the general guideline experts recommend is that children lack the decision-making skills needed for self-care before age 11.

There are a number of signs parents can use to evaluate their child's readiness, including physical, mental, social and emotional skills their children should have. For example, can

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they solve conflicts with siblings, do they recognize danger and know how to stay safe, and do they seem willing to stay alone? Likewise, parents must consider the safety of their home and neighborhood before making the decision to leave their child on their own.

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