

Do you leave your child HOME ALONE?

If your child is younger than 14, then you are breaking Illinois child protection laws.

Age appropriate guidelines

- 7 and under** Should not be left alone for any period of time, including unattended in cars, playgrounds and backyards.
- 8-10 years old** Should not be left alone for more than 1 1/2 hours and only during the day and early evening.
- 11-12 years old** May be left alone for up to 3 hours but not late at night.
- 13-15 years old** May be left unsupervised, but not overnight.
- 16-17 years old** May be left unsupervised (in some cases, for up to two nights).

SOURCE: family.findlaw.com

Safety tips

- **Make sure your child** has memorized their full name, address and important phone numbers.
- **Tell a trusted neighbor** that your child is home alone. They can help in an emergency.
- **Call your child** several times while you are away.
- **Tell your child to stay inside** with the doors locked unless they have your permission to leave.
- **Designate a "safe house"** — such as a neighbor — to run to during an emergency.
- **Never let your child use the oven** or stove when you are away.

SOURCE: <http://family.findlaw.com>

Is your child ready?

Have a trial period

Leave your child home for a short time while staying close to home and see how they manage.

Write down the rules

Make sure your child knows what is, and isn't, allowed when you are not home. Are TV, computer and video games OK? Are they allowed to use the microwave?

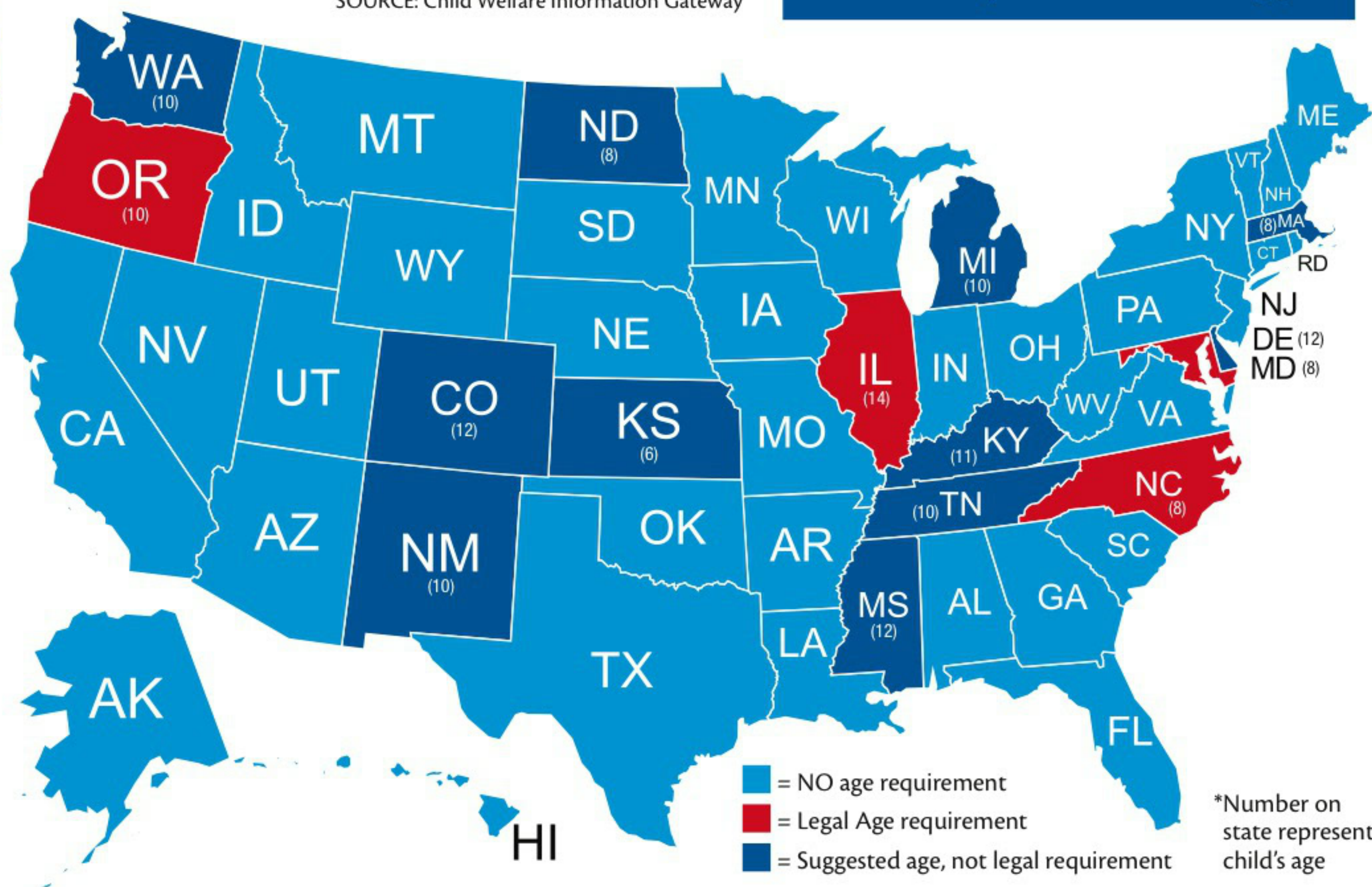
Role play and discuss emergencies

Act out situations and help your child understand what to do. What if someone knocks on the door? Should they answer the phone if it's not you checking on them? Where would they go if they got hurt?

Lock up

Teach your child how to work the locks on windows and doors and to lock them when at home.

SOURCE: Child Welfare Information Gateway



Only four states — Illinois among them — have home-alone laws.

Illinois law defines a neglected minor "under the age of 14 years, whose parent or other person responsible for the minor's welfare leaves the minor without supervision for an unreasonable period of time without regard for the mental or physical health, safety or welfare of that minor."

What does that mean? Basically, use common sense based on the age of the child and how long you'll be gone, said Andrew Flach, spokesperson for the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services.

"If we get a call that a 9-year-old is left home alone while the parents went on vacation for the weekend, that's going to raise a red flag. But if it's a 12-year-old whose mom ran to the dry cleaners for 20 minutes, maybe not," Flach said.

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What do you think?

At what age is it okay to leave a child home alone? Comment on our forum at www.tinyurl.com/ou42yje