

# Home Alone Checklist

Marietta City Schools (MCS) takes seriously the welfare of its students. Any time an employee of MCS has reasonable cause to believe that a student is the victim of abuse and/or neglect, he/she should follow the responsibilities and procedures outlined in Board policy JGEB and Administrative Guidance - Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting.

This checklist serves as a guide to what actions should be taken by the principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee in the event that a student is allegedly "home alone" during out-of-school hours (i.e. afternoons, evenings, weekends, etc.). This guide is meant to provide appropriate steps for the SSW in assessing the student's safety.

***If there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is home alone and it is deemed unsafe, a DFCS referral should be made immediately.***

***If the school administration/designee feels the child is in imminent harm or risk, local law enforcement officials should be notified immediately, followed by a DFCS referral.***

**The principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee should assess the student's situation as it relates to supervision guidelines set by Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services. These guidelines state:**

1. Students eight years or younger should not be left alone;
2. Students between the ages of nine years and twelve years, based on level of maturity, may be left alone for brief (less than two hours) periods of time; and,
3. It is strongly discouraged for parents to have thirteen-year-olds babysit infants, small children, and children that require special attention due to medical conditions;
4. Children fifteen years and older can be left home alone overnight, depending on the level of maturity of the child.

Other safety precautions to consider when leaving a child unaccompanied: Don't leave the child responsible for food preparation that involves the stove; have a neighbor or relative check in regularly or have the child check in with an adult; make a safety plan that includes 911, and rehearse it with the child.

**The principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee should follow steps outlined below:**

1. Once the principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee has learned a child is possibly home alone, SSW will attempt to interview the student at school concerning alleged concerns.
2. The principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee should speak with the guardian and/or relative regarding the alleged concern and discuss safety measures put in place, as well explore any concerns assessed while interviewing the student(s). A home visit may be made to verify possible safety issues.
3. If unable to talk with student in school, a home visit should be made to determine whether or not the child is home unsupervised.
4. Once verified student is home alone, follow these procedures:
  - o Contact the student's primary guardian regarding the student being left home unsupervised.
  - o If the primary guardian cannot be reached, the contact the remaining adult contacts (as appropriate) located within the student's permanent record and/or on Aspen.
  - o If a preponderance of evidence supports that the child is home alone *and* is deemed unsafe, a child protective services referral should be made immediately to Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS).
  - o If it is believed that the child is in *imminent* harm or risk, notify local law enforcement officials immediately followed by a child protective services referral to DFCS.

**If the principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee determines the alleged home alone student is serving in a “babysitter” capacity, attempts should be made to assess the potential risk and/or harm. The following questions should be explored:**

1. Does the student(s) know the emergency plan for the family?
2. Does the student(s) know the parent's phone numbers (work and home)?
3. Does the student(s) have access to the phone numbers of nearby relatives, neighbors or friends?
4. Can the student(s) demonstrate the plan and recite the numbers?
5. What is the availability of the parent during this time?
6. Are there environmental factors that add risk to the situation (firearm safety, water safety, any other potential hazards, etc.)?
7. Are there factors that reduce risk (i.e. supportive/available neighbors)?
8. Does the student(s) demonstrate dependability, responsibility and trustworthiness?
9. Does the student(s) have any physical, developmental, genetic, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, or psychiatric disabilities?
10. The length of time and the time of day that the student(s) will be left unsupervised.
11. Identified environmental danger(s) (e.g. unattended in a car or bathtub or with unrestricted access to a swimming pool).
12. The student's level of discomfort of being left without adult supervision.
13. The specific nature of the student's activities while he or she is left unsupervised (e.g. age-appropriate play activities versus accessing pornography on the Internet, vandalism, or shoplifting).
14. The student's knowledge and use of protocols for safely answering the telephone and/or door when he or she has been left unsupervised.
15. The student's accessibility to his or her parent or to another, specific, informed individual designated to be his or her caregiver.
16. The physical, emotional, and mental capabilities of the designated caregiver (e.g. a young baby-sitter or an elderly grandmother asked to care for too many children simultaneously).
17. The number, ages, and maturity of the other children under the caregiver's supervision.
18. The age-appropriateness of the responsibilities given to the student(s).

***The school social work department is available for consultation/intervention, as needed, regarding home alone situations.***

Based on this checklist, if the principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee feel that a child's safety may be compromised, a DFCS referral as outlined in district policy and AG - Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting, should be made immediately. The principal, person in charge of the facility, or designee can also request that a welfare check home visit be made by local law enforcement to assess the student's safety in the home environment. If it is determined that the student's safety is not compromised, and, that measures are put into place by the guardian which ensures the student's basic needs are being met, a DFCS referral is not warranted.

Under no circumstance should a student ***not*** be sent home due to alleged concern the student may be unsupervised. If the student normally rides the bus home, the school is expected to send the student home via bus and notify either DFCS and/or law enforcement immediately (if the school assesses the student may be in harm).

If a home visit is made and it is found that a child is left home alone, school/district personnel should *not* enter the home without an adult guardian (18 years and older) present.