
Public Library

Unattended Children Policy

_____ Library welcomes the use of its facilities and services by children of all ages. Our services and programs are offered to make the library enticing to children, to encourage them to visit the library, and to develop a love of books, reading and libraries.

Because the library is an open, public building, the safety and welfare of children left alone in the library is a serious concern of the Library Board and the administration. Young children, left unattended, often become frightened and anxious. Even older children, though they may be able to occupy their time for a short while, often become bored, hungry, and restless which can lead to disruptive behavior that interferes with the legitimate library business of other patrons and staff. Library staff cannot know if unattended children are leaving the building with parents or strangers or even by themselves.

For the protection and well being of children who enjoy our libraries, and to prevent undue disruption of normal library activities, the _____ Library and Board have adopted a policy statement concerning unattended or disruptive children.

1. Children aged 11 and under may not be left unattended at the Library.

Children ages 11 and under must be accompanied by a responsible person—an adult or mature adolescent (16 years of age or older). Parents/caregivers are responsible for their children's behavior while in the library and while attending library programs. Parents or caregivers should remain in the building while their child is attending a storytime or other program. The public library is not a babysitting service, but an open, public institution where all patrons have an equal right to quality library services in a safe, relaxed environment. If a child is left unattended in the library, the staff will attempt to locate the parent or caregiver. If the parent or caregiver cannot be located within 30 minutes, the police or sheriff's department may be contacted to pick up the child.

2. Self-supervised children, ages 12 and up, are welcome to use the library unattended, as long as they display acceptable library behavior.

For safety's sake, parents should make sure that their children are sufficiently mature before allowing them to visit the library by themselves. Parents should be advised that if their children display disruptive behavior, the staff may call the parent and the child may be told to leave the library. Parents, even in their absence, are legally responsible for their children's behavior.

3. The library assumes no responsibility for an unattended child—even for a very short time—before, during, or after library hours.

Staff should not be placed in the position of supervising children who are too young to be unattended, or whose behavior indicates that they have stayed at the library for too long a time.

4. Unattended Children at Closing.

Children should have definite arrangements to be picked up before closing time. Youngsters left to wait outside for a ride after the library has closed are placed in a vulnerable position. It is not the intention of _____ Library to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasoned response prepared if necessary. The Library respects the privacy of patrons and will intervene only when, in the opinion of our Staff, the safety and well being of a child is threatened. If staff has reason to suspect that a child has been left at closing time, staff will ask the child if he/she is waiting to be picked up, determine the child's name, and call the child's parent. If the parent cannot be reached or the transportation does not arrive within fifteen minutes, the police or sheriff's department will be called to assume responsibility for the child. Two staff members should remain with the child for 15 minutes after closing until the parent or the police arrive. If the police remove the child from the library premises, staff will leave a note on the door notifying the parent/caregiver.

Staff members use their judgment when dealing with unattended youth at closing, but the library staff will UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES transport or take the child away from the building.

In any situation involving youth safety and specifically whenever parents/caregivers or law enforcement personnel are contacted, staff will complete an Incident Report to be sent immediately to the Director, and a copy to be filed at the library.

In order to institute this policy, signs will be posted in each library building as follows: "While in the library, children 11 and under must be accompanied by an adult. At library closing time, a parent or guardian whose child has not been picked up will be telephoned. If there is no response to the call, the police will be contacted."