

UNATTENDED CHILDREN IN THE LIBRARY

The Town of Chester Public Library welcomes and encourages children to visit the library, use library resources and services, and attend library events. Staff members are available to help and support children. However, the Library is not able to provide short or long-term child care, or to be responsible for unattended children.

The well-being and safety of young children left alone is a serious concern. The Library is in a public building, open to all members of the community. Children on their own are vulnerable. In addition, children left unattended for an extended period of time can become bored, restless and possibly disruptive. For these reasons, the following policy has been established.

Policy

A. Children who are unable or unwilling to care for themselves may not be left alone and must have adequate supervision while in the Library. The Library is not responsible for the care or supervision of children using library facilities, nor is it responsible if children leave the Library unattended.

B. Understanding that children mature at different rates, the following guidelines have been established to ensure that children are safe and cared for while in the library:

i. *Children age 8 and younger:* A parent, guardian, or assigned chaperone/childcare provider must accompany and remain within physical reach of the child at all times. The assigned caregiver must be a responsible person (age 14 or older) and must carry emergency contact information.

ii. *Children age 9 and older:* A child in this age range may use the library unattended, but must abide by all policies and procedures adopted by the Town of Chester Public Library concerning behavior, conduct and demeanor. In the event of an emergency or disaster they must be able to leave the library independently. They must also be able to go home unsupervised if the need arises. **If a child is not able to leave without an adult, or does not have access to required transportation to reach home, that child should not be in the library unattended.**

iii. *Children of any age who require supervision in order to be safe and/or not disruptive:* A child who falls into this category must be accompanied at all times by a parent or responsible caregiver (age 14 or older).

C. Staff members are not allowed to assume responsibility for any child in the absence of a responsible caregiver.

Definitions

A. "Unattended children" are children of any age who are apparently unaccompanied by a parent, guardian, or responsible caregiver. Any child whose safety and well-being is threatened by being left unattended, considering the child's age, maturity, and level of development, may be treated as an unattended child.

B. "Children" are patrons between the ages 0 and 17. All children (0-17) are legally the responsibility of their parents or guardians.

C. "Adults" are patrons age 18 and older, and are legally responsible for their own actions.

Regulations

A. Parents, guardians, and/or caregivers are responsible for the safety, behavior, and supervision of children at all times in the Library and on town property. **If a child is not old enough to leave the library without an adult, she/he should not be left in the library without an adult.**

B. Library staff will be guided by this policy in situations including but not limited to the following:

- A child age 8 or younger is alone in the library.
- An unattended child is engaging in behavior that is disruptive to other library users, staff, or the normal operations of library business.
- An unattended child is left alone at the Library at closing time.

C. When staff observes a child age 8 or younger alone in the library, the primary goal is to ensure the safety of the child by returning the child to the care and custody of the caregiver.

- A staff member will approach the child, identify him/herself as a person who works at the library, and ask if the child knows where his/her grownup is. When the caregiver is located, staff will share the Library's Unattended Children and Rules of Conduct policies with the caregiver.
- If staff is unable to locate the parent or responsible party in the Library, the police will be called to assist the child. All staff on duty should be told that the police have been called.

D. Children are expected to respect library property and to adhere to the rules outlined in the Rules of Conduct policy. If an unattended child behaves in a disruptive manner,

per the Rules of Conduct policy the child may be warned, and if the disruptive behavior continues, asked to leave the Library.

- If a child is asked to leave the library, and is observed to be unaccompanied by a caregiver, staff will ask the child if he/she is able to leave the building without a caregiver, and if not, staff will attempt to contact a parent, guardian, and/or responsible caregiver who can pick up the child.
- If a parent, guardian, and/or responsible caregiver is not available, library staff will contact the police to assist the child.

E. Parents must be aware of the Library hours of operation. Children must leave the library at closing time. Children left to wait outside the building for a ride after the library has closed are placed in a vulnerable position. Under no circumstances will a staff member give a child a ride home.

- If a child is asked to leave the library at closing time, and is observed to be unaccompanied by a caregiver, staff will ask the child if he/she is able to leave the building without a caregiver, and if not, staff will attempt to contact a parent, guardian, and/or responsible caregiver who can pick up the child.
- If a parent, guardian, and/or responsible caregiver is not available to pick up the child at closing time, library staff will contact the police to assist the child.

F. In any situation involving the safety of children, and specifically whenever the parent/caregiver or police are contacted, staff will complete an Incident Report and submit it to the Library Director.

G. Repeated disregard, by parents, caregivers or children, of the policies outlined above may result in the loss of Library privileges.

Approved by Town of Chester Public Library Board of Trustees

Date: