

## **Policy on Unattended and/or Disruptive Children:**

**1. Purpose:** To establish a policy and set of procedures for library personnel to follow when encountering an unattended and/or disruptive child in the library. For the purpose of this policy, an unattended child is defined as a child of any age who is unable to care for himself or herself left in the Library without a parent or responsible adult within sight or sound range or a child 8 years old and younger left in the library without adult supervision. It is up to the discretion of the Library Supervisor (Librarian in charge at any particular time) to determine whether the child is to be considered as unattended.

Under this policy, children under the age of 8 years old or younger must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult, which means that the child must remain within sight of the parent or adult at all times while in the Library. The Library recommends that all children, regardless of age, be accompanied by an adult who can take responsibility if an emergency occurs.

**2. Policy:** The staff of the Ocean City Free Public Library desires to create and maintain an environment that is welcoming to children and that encourages their use and enjoyment of the various programs offered by the library, with the goal of encouraging children to develop a love of reading and learning. While pursuing these goals, the Library remains concerned about the safety and well-being of children visiting the library and enjoying its programs and services.

Children, as all Library customers, are expected to behave appropriately. Parents, guardians, teachers, and caregivers, not Library staff, are responsible for the behavior and supervision of their children in the Library.

In addition, a child's safety cannot be guaranteed if he or she is left unattended in the Library. Parents and caregivers are advised that libraries are public places and that Library staff cannot prevent children from interacting with or leaving the Library with persons who are not appropriate caregivers. This policy has been established for the protection and well-being of children who visit our Library.

### **3. Procedures:**

- a) If an unattended child is found in the library, a supervisor will be notified.
- b) The Supervisor (or designee) should try to calm the child if necessary and locate the child's parent or adult responsible for the child while in the library by walking through the library with the child, and by paging the parent or responsible adult on the Circulation desk telephone.
- c) If the parent or responsible adult cannot be located in the building, a supervisor or designee shall stay with the child in the children's section or another public area of

the Library until the parent or responsible adult is located. When the parent or responsible adult has been located, the supervisor shall explain the Policy on Unattended and/or Disruptive Children and shall give a copy to the parent or responsible adult. If the parent or responsible adult has been reached by phone, the supervisor shall request that the parent or responsible adult immediately come to the library to escort the child home. If the parent or responsible adult is unable to come immediately, he or she will be told that the police will be called upon to take responsibility for the child.

- d) If the parent or responsible adult cannot be located after a reasonable amount of time or if the library is closing, the supervisor may call the police to take charge of the child.
- e) Under no circumstances shall a staff member take the child out of the building or provide transportation elsewhere.

**4. Conduct of Children:** If any child violates the Library Patron Conduct policy, the child and the parent/responsible adult will be provided with a copy of that policy. If the child continues to violate the policy, the parent or responsible adult may be asked to leave the Library with the child. If necessary, the library may contact the child's parent or responsible adult or the police for assistance.

Although children aged 9 or older who are able to care for themselves may use the library without a parent or other adult present, parents are still responsible for the actions of their children and for their well-being. Even though children aged 9 and older are permitted to use the library without a parent or responsible adult present, parents should make sure that their children are sufficiently mature and able to care for themselves before allowing them to visit the library unaccompanied by a parent or responsible adult. Children utilizing the library without a parent or other responsible adult present should have a telephone number in their possession that the library can call if there is a need to contact the parent or responsible adult in the event of an emergency or in the event the child violates this policy or the Patron Conduct policy.

The Library is not responsible for children of any age outside the building who are waiting for transportation or are socializing. Parents of children, and adults responsible for children, in the Library should be aware of the Library's hours of operation and make arrangements for their children to have transportation at or before closing. If the library is closing and the parent or responsible adult of a child cannot be located, Library staff may contact police and remain with the child in the children's section or another public area of the Library until the police arrive.

Disruptive behavior is considered to be behavior that constitutes a danger to the child or other users of the library or that interferes with the use of the library by other library patrons

or that interferes with the ability of library employees to perform their job responsibilities. Examples of disruptive behavior include, but are not limited to:

- running in the library
- screaming, shouting, yelling, loud laughing
- Use of Profanity or Abusive or Threatening Language
- eating or drinking except as permitted in certain locations or for special events
- loud talking in quiet areas
- fighting, hitting or engaging in other physically aggressive behavior
- throwing books or other objects
- bothering other patrons
- Failing to comply with reasonable staff requests

## **5. Consequences**

Library staff may warn children engaging in disruptive behavior that the conduct is unacceptable. In cases of serious infractions, in the judgment of library personnel, a child may be required to leave the library after a single incident.

- a) If the disruptive patron is a child 8 years old or younger who came to the library WITHOUT adult supervision, staff will explain to them that they must stop the disruptive behavior (running, loudness, destruction, etc.) and the parent of or other adult responsible for the child will be called. If disruptive behavior does not stop, the staff will attempt to contact the parent or responsible adult and will require that the child leave the building with the parent or responsible adult. If a parent or responsible adult cannot be reached, the child will remain in the library under supervision in a public area of the library until such time as a parent or guardian arrives. If necessary, law enforcement officers may be called to come to the library. If behavior is repeated, they may be asked to not return to the library for an amount of time to be determined by the Library Director or designee.
- b) If the disruptive patron is a child who came to the library with a parent or responsible adult, staff will tell the parent or responsible adult that the disruptive behavior must stop or they will be required to leave the library. If disruptive behavior continues, the

person in charge may require the parent or responsible adult to remove the child from the library.

- c) Librarians and authorized staff members will call the authorities (police/sheriff, etc.) if the need arises or if they feel threatened by behavior in any way.
- d) Parents shall remain responsible, in accordance with applicable law, for damage to library property or the property of other individuals using the Library caused by their children under the age of eighteen (18) years.