

Unattended Children in the Library

A. Introduction

The Somerset County Library encourages children of all ages to visit the library and hopes they will find it a warm, inviting place to be. However, the well-being and safety of young children left alone is a serious concern. Children on their own are vulnerable and may become frightened or anxious. If unattended for an extended period of time when no library program is being offered, they can become bored, restless and disruptive. For that reason, the following policy has been established.

B. Policy

- C. All patrons, regardless of age, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion, or economic status are entitled to courteous and efficient service, access to materials and pleasant surroundings free from harassment, discomfort and stress.
- D. Library staff, however, cannot assume responsibility for the care or supervision of children using the library's facilities. Parents or responsible caregivers are responsible for the care and behavior of their children in the library. In general, 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. If an unattended child behaves in a disruptive manner, the child may be warned, and if the disruptive behavior continues, asked to leave the Library. 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 under 6:* A parent or responsible caregiver (age 13 or over) must remain with the child at all times. The child should be able to see the responsible caregiver and the caregiver should be able to see and promptly reach the child to provide assistance and insure safety at all times. Children enrolled in kindergarten may attend library programs alone as long as the responsible caregiver remains in the library.
 - ii. *Children 6 – 12:* A parent or responsible caregiver (age 13 or over) must remain in the library during the child's visit and the child should be able to find the caregiver at all times.
 - iii. *Children 13 and over:* A child in this age range may use the library alone. If problems arise, the child may be asked to leave or parents may be contacted. (See also policy on Conduct in the Library)
 - iv. *Children of any age with mental, physical or emotional problems that cause them to require supervision in order to be safe and/or not disruptive:* A child who falls into one of these categories must be accompanied at all times by a parent or responsible caregiver (age 13 or older).

- E. If problems arise while children are using the library, or if the child is left alone (based on the above guidelines), the library staff will attempt to reach the parents. If the parents or guardian cannot be contacted after 15 minutes, the police may be called.

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