

## UNATTENDED CHILDREN POLICY

The **Pennsauken Free Public 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 be bored, restless, and disruptive. It is not the Library's intention to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasonable response prepared if problems present themselves. For that reason, the following policy has been established:

- A. Library staff are available to assist and support children with their use of Library resources. However, the Library is not responsible for children who are left unattended on Library premises. An unattended child is a child of any age who is apparently unaccompanied by a parent/guardian or caregiver. Children who are unable or unwilling to care for themselves may not be left alone in the Library and must have adequate supervision from a responsible caregiver.
- B. The Library cannot be responsible for any consequences of caregivers forfeiting their responsibilities. Library staff may refer to appropriate authorities those children who are left unattended in the Library.
- C. Parents/guardians and caregivers must be advised that libraries are public places. In libraries, as in all public places, "stranger danger" is a real concern. Library staff cannot prevent children from interacting with or leaving the Library with persons who are not appropriate caregivers.

Therefore, Library staff cannot assume responsibility for the care or supervision of children using the Library's facilities. Parents/guardians or adult caregivers are responsible for the care and behavior of their children in the Library and on its grounds.
- D. Like all Library users, children - both attended and unattended - are expected to behave appropriately and abide by the **<Library's Rules of Conduct>**. Disruptive children who violate the Rules of Conduct may be asked to leave the Library premises or the parents/guardians may be contacted.
- E. Attendance at Library programs, browsing for recreational reading, and after school use of the Library for homework and study are encouraged and considered appropriate. Library staff will provide reference and research assistance as needed with minimal supervision.
- F. After extended periods of time, or in case of a problem, the Library Director or the Supervisor-on-Duty may determine what is a reasonable length of time for the minors to be left unattended. Parents/guardians will be notified and asked to pick up and/or provide supervision for their child. In general, the Library considers more than 2-3 (two – three) hours (depending upon the age and conduct of the child) to be excessive and inappropriate.
- G. If problems arise while children are using the Library or if they are left alone, the Library staff will attempt to reach the parents or guardians.

- H. Parents, guardians, responsible caregivers, and/or teachers are solely responsible for ensuring that children have transportation home once the Library closes. Under no circumstances will a staff member drive any children to any other location. If there are any unattended children left in the Library at closing time without transportation, staff will attempt to contact the parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, the matter will be referred to the Pennsauken Police Department.
- I. A child of any age who has a medical condition that requires substantial monitoring must not be left alone in the Library. A responsible adult must be in attendance in the same department of the Library as the child and must maintain an awareness of the child's location and activity.
- J. Children who have special needs because of disabling conditions such as impaired physical and mental ability, disruptive behavior, emotional problems, inadequate attention span, incomplete social skills, etc., shall be attended by a responsible caregiver at all times.
- K. When Library staff have reason to suspect that a minor with a special need is in need of care due to abandonment, lack of supervision or neglect based on a failure to comply with or utter disregard of this policy, the Library Director or Supervisor-on-Duty attempt to contact the parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, the matter will be referred to the proper authorities.
- L. For policies regarding the use of the internet, wireless or computers by unattended children see: < **Computer & Wireless Policy** >.

## **DEFINITIONS and LEVELS OF SUPERVISION**

### **Definitions**

A **Minor** is a youth under the age of 18, herein after referred to as child.

An **unattended child** is any child below the age of 18 whose safety and well-being is threatened by being left unattended for an inappropriate length of time considering the child's age, maturity and level of development. Up to the age of 14, unattended means that the parent or caregiver has not left the building.

A **responsible adult** may be a parent, guardian, or caregiver.

A **responsible caregiver** is a parent, guardian, or babysitter or sibling 14 years or age or over. Care providers must supervise and provide guidance and control for their charges at all times.

**Appropriate behavior:** Parents should encourage their children to respect Library property and the rights of others who use the Library in regard to play, noise and safety. Although the Library is a fun place for children, playground behavior is not appropriate in the Library building. The Library reserves the right to limit the use of the Library by children and parents

who, in the judgment of the Library staff, are infringing upon the rights of other Library users by inappropriate behavior.

## **Level of Supervision**

The safety of children left alone in a Library building is a serious concern of the Library staff. The responsibility for the safety and behavior of children in the Library rests with the parent / guardian / caregiver and not with the Library personnel. Library employees cannot be responsible for children who are unattended or demonstrating inappropriate behavior. The following guidelines will be followed concerning the care and behavior of young Library users.

### ***For children ages 5 and under:***

Children 5 years of age and younger may not be left unattended in the Library. They must be under the direct supervision (within sight) of a parent / guardian or other responsible adult caregiver when in the Library including when using a computer.

Children under the age of 5 using the children's computers must have the care provider present at the computer at all times.

Exceptions to this policy occur when programming requires children to attend on their own. At these times, children should be brought to the Community room door prior to the program and be met outside the door at its conclusion by parents/guardians or caregivers. Parents / guardians / caregivers remain responsible for the actions of their children during Library programs.

If a child in this age group is found unattended, Library staff will attempt to locate the parent / guardian in the Library and inform him/her of the rules. If the parent / guardian cannot be found in the Library, the Library staff will attempt to contact the parents/guardians by phone. In the case where an adult caregiver cannot be found, the Library Director or their Supervisor-on-Duty will contact the appropriate authorities.

### ***For children ages 6 - 13***

Children 6 – 13 may use the Library unattended for an amount of time appropriate to their age and maturity. Prior to allowing their child of 6 years old or older to use the Library, parents / guardians and their children should review Library conduct rules. Copies of library rules may be obtained from any Library information or reference desk.

Parents / guardians remain responsible for the actions of their children. Children using inappropriate behavior will be informed of the rules. If inappropriate behavior continues, the Library staff will attempt to contact the parents/guardians by phone. If a child in this age group

is behaving inappropriately and is unaccompanied by an adult or a responsible caregiver, the Library Director or Supervisor-on-Duty will contact the appropriate authorities.

***For children ages 14 and over***

Children ages 14 and older may use the Library on their own. However, parents are still responsible for the actions and well-being of their child(ren). In accordance with the Code of Conduct, patrons, including children, engaging in inappropriate behavior may be asked to leave the Library. If a child 14 and older is not able to leave the Library on his/her own then the Library staff will attempt to contact a parent/caregiver. In the case where an adult caregiver cannot be found, the Library Director or Supervisor-on-Duty will contact the appropriate authorities.

All unaccompanied children at the Library should have the telephone number of someone who can assist them in an emergency. The Library Staff may not take responsibility for the care of a minor or an incompetent adult.

Persistent or severe violations of the Library's rules may result in the suspension of the Library privileges for the Child and the responsible Adult/Guardian for a determinate or indeterminate period of time. Revoked privileges may include the right to enter or use the facility and/or borrow materials. **The Library Director is authorized to develop procedures for persistent or severe violations of the Library's rules.**

*Approved 7/22/2019; updated and approved 9/25/2023*