

Thomas Memorial Library Policy Manual

Safe Child and Vulnerable Adults Policy

Purpose

The Thomas Memorial Library strives to provide a comfortable, safe and welcoming environment for children of all ages. The library is a public building, with staff trained to provide public library services, including programs and resources offered to make the library enticing to children and to help them develop a love of reading, offer access to educational resources, and developmentally appropriate programming. However, busy public buildings are not secure places for children to be left alone.

Appropriate library behavior (as outlined in the *General Use Policy*) is expected of all library patrons, regardless of age. It is important for everyone to have the appropriate supervision and support to enjoy the library, particularly in regards to the safety of children, as well as vulnerable adults. The *Safe Child and Vulnerable Adults Policy* clarifies additional ways that safety is maintained in regards to use of the library.

Disruptive behavior (as outlined in the *General Use Policy*) is grounds for being asked to leave the library at the discretion of the library staff. Regardless of age, behavior is considered disruptive when it disturbs the normal use of the library by other patrons, interferes with the staff in the performance of their duties, or endangers the well-being of anyone, including oneself.

Definitions

An unattended child is defined as:

- A child ~~under the age of thirteen (13)~~ aged ten (10) and under who is not accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, custodian or caregiver age ~~18-~~ sixteen (16) or older;
- A child who is eleven (11) or twelve (12) years old who remains in the library for an extended period of time, defined as more than sixty (60) minutes.
- A child between the ages of thirteen (13) and (16) who is using the library independently, but is not picked up by closing time and needs assistance procuring transportation;
- A child under the age of eighteen (18) who appears to need staff help beyond assistance with normal library service, and is not accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, custodian or caregiver age 18 or older.

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A vulnerable adult is defined as:

- An adult who is unable to reasonably care for himself/herself in an emergency situation. This includes adults who are mentally or physically challenged and who need staff help beyond assistance with normal library services and are not under the direct supervision of a parent, legal guardian or caregiver.
- An adult not picked up by closing time who is in need of assistance in procuring transportation.

Safe Child Policy

Children of all ages are encouraged to attend age-appropriate library programs, browse for recreational reading, and use the library facility for studying and recreational reading. Parents and guardians are asked to work with library staff to assure that the library experience is safe and positive for children and all library users by adhering to the principles and guidelines outlined in this policy.

- The Thomas Memorial Library is a public municipal facility, not a school facility. Library staff, unlike teachers and school employees, are not authorized or mandated to act *in loco parentis* (in place of the parent.) Children using the library are not supervised or attended to as they would be in a school setting. The library is not an appropriate place for children to stay unattended for extended periods of time, including after school while waiting for a caregiver to pick them up. See the chart entitled “Levels of Supervision Required” for guidelines for specific ages.

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- Library staff cannot monitor who comes and goes from the library building. If a parent or caregiver does not want their child to leave the library unattended, that child should not be left in the library alone.
- If a child is too young to be left at home alone for an extended period of time, that child is too young to be left in the library unattended. Library staff cannot assume responsibility for children's safety and comfort when they are unattended.
- The library is not equipped—nor is it the library's role—to provide long-or short-term childcare. The responsibility for the care, safety, and behavior of children lies with their parents or caregivers, both within the library building and on library grounds.
- Children, or persons of any age, should not play, run or otherwise act in an unsafe manner in the library's parking lot area. As with all behavior, inappropriate use of the parking lot area and the library grounds is the responsibility of parents/caregivers.
- Staff does not monitor the arrival or departure of any child from a program or the building and cannot report on their whereabouts.
- For the safety and privacy of patrons, Thomas Memorial Library will not disclose over the phone that a particular person is in the library, nor will staff seek out a particular patron at the request of a caller. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of library staff in the case of an emergency. However, parents of minors should make arrangements with their minor child in advance of their library visit on how to stay in communication with them. A free public is available in the lobby for general use.
- All minors must also have the phone number of a parent/caregiver who may be contacted in an emergency. The library Director will send a follow-up letter to the parent(s) documenting any incident where a child is left alone, not picked up on time or where the child created a problem and library staff could not reach a parent or guardian.
- ~~Children must know how to reach an adult in case of an emergency, and both child and adult should be aware of library hours. (redundant)~~
- Parents are responsible for the safety of their children who may visit the Cumberland Farms or other area establishments to purchase snacks, candy, or soda; children and parents should be aware of the kinds of food and beverages that are allowed inside the library, as outlined in the **Food and Beverage Policy**.
- Library staff may not transport children to any location, even by request of the parent/caregiver.

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Levels of Supervision Required

Age of Child	Support and Supervision
Under 6	Must be directly supervised by a parent or responsible caregiver age 48 16 and over at all times while in the library.
Ages 6 - 8	May enjoy the children's room while parents or caregivers briefly visit other areas of the library, but the parent or caregiver must remain in the library. A child may attend a program in the program room by him/herself; however, the parent/caregiver must be ready to meet that child promptly when the program ends or have made arrangements clear with the child regarding leaving the library with a designated caregiver. Library staff cannot monitor children to ensure they leave with the proper caregiver.
Ages 9 to 12 10	May enjoy any part of the library while parents or caregivers visit other areas of the library, but the parent or caregiver must remain in the building.
Ages 11 - 12	Are welcome to use the library unattended for limited periods of time, up to sixty (60) minutes, provided they demonstrate purposeful intent to use library resources, and that their behavior is not disruptive to other patrons or library staff. Children are subject to the same rules of behavior as other patrons and the same consequences, including being asked to leave the building and/or premises. Continued inappropriate behavior will result in the requirement that they be attended by a parent or legal guardian.

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Ages 13 and up	<p>May be left unattended, providing they understand and follow library rules and observe proper conduct. Children are subject to the same rules of behavior as other patrons and the same consequences, including being asked to leave the building and/or premises. Continued inappropriate behavior will result in the requirement that they be attended by a parent or legal guardian.</p> <p><i>If a parent or caregiver does not want their child to leave the library unattended, that child should not be left in the library alone. All minors must also have the phone number of a parent/caregiver who may be contacted in an emergency. The library Director will send a follow-up letter to the parent(s) documenting any incident where a child is left alone, not picked up on time or where the child created a problem and library staff could not reach a parent or guardian. (The content in this section was moved up to the policy guidelines.)</i></p>
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Vulnerable Adults Policy

- Vulnerable adults who can understand and follow the **General Use Policy** and who can care for themselves are welcomed to be in the library unattended. They should have contact information for someone who can assist them in an emergency.
- Adults 18 years of age or older who are functionally, mentally, or physically unable to reasonably care for themselves in an emergency situation should not be left alone or unattended in the library, including at library programs.
- Any adult who is unable to provide for their own personal care needs and/or manage their own behavior without caregiver assistance should not be left in the library without a responsible caregiver.
- Any adult who needs help from staff beyond assistance with normal library services should not be left in the library without a responsible caregiver.

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- Regardless of cognitive ability/developmental age, a vulnerable adult cannot be left alone in the children’s department or teen area.
- Any time vulnerable adults are left unattended in the library, staff will attempt to discuss this policy with the caregiver.
- Library staff may not transport vulnerable adults to any location, even by request of the caregiver.

General Emergencies

- During library hours, when staff believe that the safety of an unattended child or vulnerable adult is in doubt, library staff will attempt to contact the caregiver before calling 911.
- In the case of an immediate safety concern, staff will contact 911 immediately and then attempt to contact the caregiver.

At Closing

- Library employees will notify the library Supervisor on duty of any unattended child or vulnerable adult still present in the library 10 minutes prior to closing.
- Staff will help contact a parent, guardian, or caregiver for a ride.
- If an unattended child under ~~13~~ 16 without means of transportation or a vulnerable person of any age has not successfully contacted a parent, guardian, or caregiver at closing or that caregiver has not arrived by closing, staff will contact the police at the non-emergency number.

Procedures Regarding Unattended Children and Vulnerable Adults

Who is Unattended	Procedure
Child under age 6	A small child who is left unattended and is frightened should be taken to the children’s area and comforted while another staff member tries to find the child’s

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	<p>caregiver. When the responsible caregiver is located, our policy should be explained.</p> <p><i>Supervisor.</i> If a child under the age of 6 continues to be left unattended by a caregiver in the building and has been approached by staff, a paper copy of the policy will be presented and the child and caregiver will be asked to leave the library for the day by an appropriate supervisory staff member.</p>
Child ages 6-9	<p>Child will be approached by staff to determine if a caregiver is present. If not, the caregiver will be notified by supervisory staff by phone that it is unacceptable to leave a child of this age unattended at the library, and the policy will be explained.</p> <p>If the child continues to be left at the library unattended, the Director will be notified and will notify police.</p>
Child 9 10 years old or younger	<p>If a child 9 10 years old or younger is left unattended and the responsible caregiver cannot be located within a 15 minute search by library staff or contacted by phone, the police will be called by a supervisory staff member. Staff will not transport children under any circumstances.</p>
Child 11 - 12	<p>If a child 11 - 12 years old has been in the library for an extended period of time and is upset, in need of supervision or assistance, or disruptive to others, staff will ask the child to contact a parent or caregiver using their own phone or public phone for assistance, or will ask for contact information to do so themselves. If a responsible caregiver cannot be contacted within 15 minutes, the police will be called by a supervisory staff member.</p>
Children under 16 at closing	<p>Unattended children should be asked 15 minutes before closing if they have a ride. After the library closes, the age of the child should determine whether or not to contact police. If police are called, 2 staff members should stay with the child until their arrival.</p>
Vulnerable adults	<p>In the event that a staff member has concern for the safety of a vulnerable adult who does not appear to have someone to assist them or has concern for the safety, security, and wellbeing of the general public or library property because of actions by or behavior of a vulnerable adult, the following actions will be taken: staff will attempt to locate a caregiver to advise them of the policy and level of</p>

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	supervision and support required; supervisory staff will be notified and will provide any further follow up, presenting a copy of the written policy. If no such person is available or if the situation warrants immediate action, the police department will be called to assist.
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Follow Up

After normal procedures have been followed, especially if repeated incidents occur or an incident report is filed, a letter will be sent by the Library Director directly to caregivers stressing the library's concern for the safety of unattended children and the importance of developing alternative care options. Similarly, a letter will be sent to managing programs or group homes if there are concerns about the safety of vulnerable adults. Repeated violations of the policy will result in further action (please see the **General Use Policy**.)

Staff Scripts

This is language provides guidance for staff in situations where a child is left unattended:

Child under age 6, caregiver in building: The library is a very busy place and our staff cannot be responsible for keeping an eye on your child. It's really not safe for them to be out of your sight for any amount of time, we ask that you please enjoy the library together at all times.

Child under the age of ~~43~~ 11 who arrives unattended, contacting caregiver by phone: This is _____ from the library. Your child _____ is here with us. The library is a very busy place and our staff cannot be responsible for keeping an eye on your child. It's just not safe for him/her to be here alone. Now, our policy is that children ~~43~~ 10 and under must be accompanied in the library by a parent or guardian. Will someone be able to come join them at the library or pick them up?

Child 11 - 12 years old who remains unattended in the library for an extended period of time and needs supervision or intervention, contacting caregiver by phone: This is

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_____ from the library. Your child _____ has been here for an extended period of time and seems to have reached the point of needing some supervision. The library is a very busy place and our staff cannot be responsible for keeping an eye on your child. Our policy is that children between the ages of 10 and 13 should not be left alone in the library beyond an age-appropriate amount of time, usually a benchmark of about 60 minutes. Your child has been here for _____ amount of time and is in need of _____ assistance. Will someone be able to come join them at the library or pick them up?

Approaching an unattended child: Hi! How are you? Can I help you find anything? Is there an adult here with you today? Could you help me find them so I can remind them of some rules to keep everyone safe at the library? Thanks!

Revised: April 14, 2021

Voted for recommendation of approval by the TML Committee on: April 29, 2021

Amended at the request of the Town Council on: July 7, 2021

Adopted with Town Council approval on:

Policy Review: This policy shall be reviewed at least every 2 years.