

Unattended Children

For the purpose of this policy, children shall be defined as Library patrons under the age of sixteen.

Unattended Children During Library Operating Hours: *The Library is a public building available for use by everyone. Because it is a place where children gather, it may attract people whose interest in children is not entirely wholesome. The safety and security of children left on their own without supervision is of serious concern to the Cape Girardeau Public Library Board of Trustees, administration, and staff. For the protection and well-being of children who visit the Library, the following policy has been established:*

The responsibility to supervise a child using the Library rests at all times with that child's parent or legal guardian. CGPL staff has other necessary duties that prevent them from providing that level of individual supervision for children using the Library. CGPL staff also lacks legal standing to provide such supervision since they may not act in loco parentis. When children attend activity programs sponsored by the Library they are supervised by CGPL staff only during the scheduled time of the program and only in the room or area where the program is presented.

Because the supervision Library staff can provide is limited, we strongly recommend that children of all ages should be accompanied to the Library by their parent or legal guardian or a caregiver designated by the parent or legal guardian.

For their own safety and security, children 6 years old and younger must be continually attended by a parent or legal guardian, or a caregiver (over the age of 16) designated by the parent or legal guardian, at all times while in the Library. A parent or legal guardian or caregiver (over the age of 16) must accompany children between the ages of 7 and 11 but does not need to continually attend them so long as the parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver is present and available in the building.

Children ages 12 and older who are left on their own at the Library should have with them a phone number where a parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver may be reached as needed. Parents and legal guardians or designated caregivers must understand that they are still responsible for the behavior of their children while the children are using the Library. Children who misbehave, refuse to follow directions of Library staff, disrupt the orderly conduct of the Library, interfere with staff carrying out their duties, or prevent other patrons from using the Library may not remain in the Library. Library staff will notify their parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver to remove the children from Library premises.

If children refuse to give Library staff a phone number where the parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver can be reached, or if the parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver cannot be reached, or when reached, is unable or unwilling to remove the children from the Library in a timely manner, Library staff may require the children to remain seated under the direct supervision of a Library staff member until the parent or legal guardian or caregiver arrives. The Library staff may at that time give the parent or legal guardian or caregiver written notice that the children have been suspended from using the Library for a period of time appropriate to the disruption caused.

If the parent or legal guardian or designated caregiver is unable or unwilling to remove the children from the Library in a timely manner, and the children continue to disrupt the orderly conduct of the Library, the Library staff may invoke the provisions of this policy that apply to unattended children after Library operating hours (see below).

Unattended Children After Library Operating Hours: *The Cape Girardeau Public Library's Board of Trustees believes that the fundamental responsibility for children's physical well-being remains with the parent or legal guardian of that child. This policy is enacted because of numerous incidents involving children left at the Library after the announced closing time.*

Parents, legal guardians, and caregivers designated by parents and legal guardians should be familiar with the Library's hours of operation and should not leave children on their own and unsupervised before the Library opens or after it closes. Also, parents, legal guardians, and caregivers should be aware that the Library may be closed or close early due to scheduled holidays or unscheduled occurrences such as severe weather or other emergencies. Prior arrangements and contingency plans for IMMEDIATE pick-up in such instances should be discussed with children in advance.

The Cape Girardeau Public Library can assume no responsibility for children on Library property who are not physically within the Library building at closing time, nor can the Library assume responsibility for children on Library property outside the building before the Library's opening time.

If children are in the building at the time of closing and have no means of transportation, the Library staff will obtain their names and addresses, their phone numbers, and the names of their parents or legal guardians or caregivers designated by the parents or legal guardians. Library staff will telephone the parents or guardians or caregivers and request immediate pick-up of the children. If Library staff are unable to reach a parent or guardian, the police department will be called and request that the police take custody of the children. Library staff will follow up with letters to the parents or guardians explaining closing hours, Library responsibility for the children's safety, and other specifics delineated in this policy. Two staff members should stay with the children until the situation is resolved.

If the children are not picked up within twenty (20) minutes after the parent, guardian, or designated caregiver has been contacted, the Library staff will contact the police department and request that the police take custody of the children. Library staff will leave a note prominently displayed on the exterior door to inform the parent or guardian or designated caregiver that the children have been turned over to the custody of the police.

*APPROVED by the Board of Trustees of the Cape Girardeau Public Library this 22nd day of May, 2008.
Age levels amended 5/28/09; Amended 02/04/2021; Reviewed 06/06/2023.*