

## **Unattended Children in the Library Policy and Procedures Talbot County Free Library**

The Talbot County Free Library welcomes all children and their families to use its facilities, resources, and services. Responsibility for children using the Library rests with the parent or designated caregiver and not with the Library staff. For the safety and protection of young library users, the Talbot County Free Library has adopted the following policy concerning children left unattended in the Library.

### **Unattended children under the age of eight**

- Parents/caregivers may not leave children under the age of eight unattended in the Library at any time. [See Maryland Annotated Code, Family Law, 5-801] The state of Maryland requires that a caregiver be at least thirteen years old.
- The Library in no way assumes responsibility for any child under the age of eight left unattended in the building.
- Parents/caregivers are responsible for their children's behavior while in the Library and for ensuring that their children obey Library rules and regulations.
- Parents/caregivers must remain in the Library during library-sponsored programs (e.g., Story Hour, craft programs, films, etc.) if the child is under the age of eight.
- Library staff will try to be aware of unaccompanied children in the Library, particularly during the hour before closing. If a child under the age of eight is found without an adult, a staff member will identify himself/herself to the child and attempt to locate the parent/caregiver. If the parent/caregiver cannot be located in the building, the following procedure will be followed:
  1. Staff will obtain the child's name, phone number, and any information as to the identity of a parent/caregiver and will try to contact the parent/caregiver at home or work. **Under no circumstances will a staff member give the child a ride home, take the child outside the building, or offer the child a seat in his/her car.**
  2. When the parent/caregiver is contacted, s/he will be informed of Library policy and told that the child must be picked up immediately. Parent/caregiver should also be told that if s/he is unable to pick up the child within approximately 15 minutes, the child will be placed in the care of law enforcement personnel. If this occurs near closing time and parent/caregiver states that s/he is able to pick up the child within approximately 15 minutes, **two** staff members will stay with the child inside the building until the parent/caregiver arrives. Staff will record the event in an Incident Report, including the time that the parent/caregiver was contacted. **Parent/caregiver must pick up the child within approximately 15 minutes of being contacted. This policy may *not* be interpreted as granting a "grace period" of 15 minutes past closing time.**
  3. If a parent/caregiver cannot be contacted by phone, or if the parent/caregiver who was contacted has not picked up the child within approximately 15

minutes of being called, Library staff will contact the appropriate law enforcement agency (see list below) and record the event in an Incident Report. **Two** staff members will stay with the child inside the building until law enforcement personnel arrive.

4. Once the child has been placed in the care of law enforcement personnel, staff will leave notes to this effect on the front and back doors of the Library.
5. Parents who continue to disregard Library policy regarding this matter may be reported to the appropriate social services agency and/or may lose all Library privileges.

### **Unattended children ages eight and over**

- Children eight and older are responsible for obeying Library rules and regulations.
- The Library in no way assumes responsibility for any child eight and older left unattended in the building.
- Parents/caregivers of children between the ages of eight and twelve must have a responsible plan for picking up their children by closing time. Children must be made aware of the specific arrangements that have been made.
- The procedure for dealing with unattended children under the age of eight (outlined above) may also be applied to any:
  1. Child that has not been picked up within 15 minutes of closing.
  2. Child that has become ill or frightened. Circumstances such as weather conditions, library location, or vulnerability of the child may also necessitate following the same procedure as with a younger child.
  3. Child that has become disruptive and has not responded to verbal warnings issued by Library staff.
- Parents who continue to disregard Library policy regarding this matter may be reported to the appropriate social services agency and/or may lose all Library privileges.

### **Law enforcement agencies**

Easton Police Department: 410-822-1111 or 911

St. Michaels Police: 410-745-9500 or 911

Talbot County Sheriff: 911

[Special thanks to Alleghany County Library System for providing the model for this policy.]

Unattended Children in the Library Policy  
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