

Safe Child Policy

The Newburyport Public Library (hereinafter referred to as the Library or NPL) strives to provide a pleasant and welcoming environment for all. Children of all ages are encouraged to visit the Library, attend programs, and take advantage of age-appropriate resources and services. The collaborative effort of caregivers and Library staff maintain an overall safe environment. The existence of this overall safe environment may lead some patrons to believe that it is acceptable to leave young children unsupervised. The NPL created this policy to provide guidance to help ensure the Library remains a safe and positive experience for children.

Roles and Responsibilities

Library staff are responsible for the following:

- Providing Library services and resources
- Ensuring the overall safety of Library patrons

Library staff are not responsible for the following:

- Providing childcare
- Assuming direct supervision of children left unattended on Library premises
- Acting in the place of parents, guardians, or caregivers

Parents, guardians, and/or caregivers are responsible for the following:

- Ensuring the safety, appropriate behavior, and supervision of children at all times in the Library and on Library premises

Definitions

For brevity and clarity, the following terms used throughout this policy are defined as follows:

Age: A child is of a certain age until they reach their next birthday (e.g., a five-year old is age five until they reach their sixth birthday)

Caregiver: A parent, legal guardian, or responsible person at least 14 years of age charged with the supervision of a child of age 13 or younger

Behavioral Expectations of Independent Children

Children, like all Library users, are expected to respect NPL property and act in a manner appropriate to the use and function of the Library, in accordance with the Patron Policy (see Patron Policy for more information). Children behaving in accordance with the Patron Policy are safer Library users. If a child's behavior is contrary to the Patron Policy, the child may be asked to leave the Library and will be given the opportunity to contact a caregiver. The NPL assumes no responsibility for the whereabouts of an unattended child who has been asked to leave Library property.

Tiered Levels of Independent Library Use

In recognition that children as young as age 6 may begin to act independently of their caregivers, the NPL has developed guidelines for independent Library use for children ages 6–

13. The NPL does not consider children under the age of 6 capable of unsupervised use of the Library and its resources.

For children ages 6–8 years:

- Children attending a Library program may be left unsupervised by a caregiver for the duration of the program. Caregivers are required to remain in the Library for the duration of the program and to meet their children after the program ends.
 - While attending off-site and large-scale Library programs (i.e., programs with more than 30 participants), caregivers are to remain with their child for the duration of the program.
- Children may independently use Library books, computers, and other circulating materials while caregivers remain in their visual presence.
- When not attending a program, caregivers are to accompany children in the Library.

For children ages 9–10 years:

- Children are allowed access to the Children’s Room and its materials without caregiver supervision until a caregiver arrives to meet them.
- Children must be able to communicate to Library staff the following information:
 - That their caregivers are aware of their being at the NPL
 - Their caregiver’s contact information, in case of an emergency or unexpected early closure
- If a caregiver feels it is unsafe for their child to leave the Library building without supervision, the child should not be allowed to visit the Library without caregiver supervision.

For children ages 11–13 years:

- Children are allowed independent use of the Children’s Room or Teen Loft and its materials without caregiver supervision until a caregiver arrives to meet them.
- Children must be able to communicate to Library staff the following information:
 - That their caregivers are aware of their being at the NPL
 - Their caregiver’s contact information, in case of an emergency or unexpected early closure
- If a caregiver feels it is unsafe for their child to leave the Library building without supervision, the child should not be allowed to visit the Library without caregiver supervision.

Children Left Unattended in the Library during Library Hours

A child left unattended for an extended period is considered unsafe under the following circumstances:

- The child is younger than 9 years old.
- The child is unable to convey their caregiver’s contact information to Library staff.

When Library staff become aware of a child in this situation, they will take the following action:

- Make every reasonable effort to identify and contact a caregiver
- Distribute this policy upon arrival of the identified caregiver
- Call 911 if a child is in immediate danger or requires medical assistance

Children Left Unattended after Library Closing Times

Parents, guardians, and caregivers need to be aware of scheduled Library closing times and understand that the NPL may have to close unexpectedly due to weather emergencies or safety issues.

- It is the responsibility of parents, guardians, or caregivers to educate their children on what they should do if they must leave the Library due to an emergency or unexpected early closure.
- All children should be able to convey their caregiver's contact information to Library staff.
- Every reasonable effort will be made to contact an unattended child's caregiver prior to closing time.
- Once the Library is closed, children are not allowed to wait in the building and staff are not allowed to stay with a child after closing.
- Library staff will contact the police when the following has occurred:
 - A child appears to be at risk.
 - A child is left unattended when the Library closes and the following occurs:
 - Caregiver is not present
 - Caregiver could not be contacted
- Under no circumstances will Library staff transport or take a child away from the Library building.

Unaccompanied Adult Use of the Children's Room and Teen Loft

Everyone is welcome to browse the Children's collection and find materials to check out. Out of a concern for the safety of young library users, the seating, tables, computers, electronic equipment, and other stand-alone activities within the Children's Room are exclusively for the use of children, their caregivers, and their families. Unaccompanied adults using these spaces for purposes other than browsing the collection to locate materials for checkout will be asked to move to other areas of the library primarily used by adults. Likewise, the Teen Loft and the furniture and equipment therein are for the use of teens ages 18 years and younger. Unaccompanied adults who are not browsing the Young Adult collection will be asked to move to other areas of the library.

Board of Trustees Authority

The Board of Trustees reserves the right to amend this policy and to rule on situations not expressly covered herein. The Board of Trustees and the Library Director will review this policy as needed.

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