

Unattended Children

The Midland Park Memorial Library strives to serve children of all ages and to create an appealing environment that fosters a love of reading and an awareness of the cultural significance of libraries. Parents/caregivers are responsible for their child's safety and behavior while in the Library whether the parent/caregiver is present or not. Library employees cannot function as caregivers or babysitters. The Library is not equipped, and it is not the Library's role, to provide long or short term childcare.

Children, like all library patrons, are expected to behave appropriately.

The Library cannot accomplish these goals without addressing the safety and well-being of children or dependent individuals (individuals of any age unable to make decisions about their own safety and well-being) left unattended in the building, the parking lot or the surrounding area. Children left unattended may become frightened, anxious, bored and/or disruptive since the library is a public facility, susceptible to danger.

By law, Library staff members cannot provide care or supervision to unattended children. **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 the appropriate chaperone.** Even if the library were legally allowed to do so, staff members do not know the specific needs of the individual children in the library nor are they available to monitor their behavior or know when their well-being is threatened. Staff members cannot know if children are leaving the building without proper supervision, with their parents or with strangers.

They cannot even observe children outside the building. It is with this background and upon these assumptions that the following policy and procedures were developed out of the utmost concern for the children of our community.

Policy

Children age 12 (7th grade) or older, may use the computers in the adult area of the library. Children ages 11 and under must use the computers in the Children's Room. The Children's Librarian will monitor the computers in the Children's Room for appropriate usage. The priority for the children's computers is school work.

Children Under the Age of 10 or Dependent Individuals

Children under the age of 10 or dependent individuals of any age must be accompanied by a responsible caregiver at all times. A responsible caregiver is defined as anyone over the age of 14 or in 9th grade.

Children Between the Ages of 10 and 12

Children between the ages of 10 and 12 may be left alone for two hours, but their parents or guardians are responsible for their behavior and well-being even when they are not present. If your child misbehaves, staff members will attempt to notify parents or guardians. If, in their judgment, the child's behavior or well-being warrants such notification and when, in the judgment of the library staff, the matter is urgent, the police may be notified. Parents or guardians are strongly advised to leave their contact information with a library staff member. **Parents** are responsible for their children, they must be accessible. Parents who leave children in this age group unattended must pick them up at least 20 minutes before closing time.

Children Between the Ages of 13 and 17

Children between the ages of 13 and 17 may be in the library without adult supervision. However, their parents or guardians are responsible for their behavior, their safety and their well-being. If the child is disruptive or if the child's well-being is deemed to be compromised, the librarian in charge is obligated to take the appropriate action.

Procedures for Unattended Children or Dependent Individuals

The Midland Park Memorial Library welcomes children of all ages to use and enjoy the facilities, collections and programs offered by the Library in a safe and comfortable environment. Service to children is an important facet of the Library's mission. Of paramount importance is the safety and well-being of children as well as adults who visit the Library. As such, children are expected to adhere to the same standards of conduct expected from adults. Parents, guardians, caregivers or designated chaperones are responsible for the behavior of their children while in the Library. Children under the age of nine (9) may not be left alone on the Library premises without the supervision of a parent, guardian, caregiver or designated chaperone aged fourteen(14) and above. The Library staff is not authorized to act in place of parents, guardians or caregivers and cannot adequately monitor unattended children. Unaccompanied children over the age of ten who are disruptive will be asked to leave the library. If it is determined that a child cannot safely leave the library to return home on his or her own, staff will permit the child to call a parent, guardian, caregiver or designated chaperone. If no parent, guardian, caregiver or designated chaperone can be contacted, Library staff will allow the child to remain at the Library until the responsible adult can be contacted. Action regarding an unattended child under age ten (10) years, including contacting the police, social services, or another agency, will be taken when his/her health or safety become an issue or there is disruptive behavior in violation of the patron Code of Conduct. Children who have not been picked up at closing time will be given the opportunity to call a parent, guardian, caregiver or designated chaperone and two (2) staff members will wait inside the vestibule with the child. Children who have not been picked up within 15 minutes after closing will be left in the care of the Midland Park Police Department. Under no circumstances will staff transport children in a vehicle or accompany them home.

A copy of this policy must be displayed in the Children's Library

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