

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

The J. V. Fletcher Library welcomes children of all ages and encourages them to explore and enjoy the multiple resources and programs available to them at the Library. It is the strong desire of the J. V. Fletcher Library Trustees that the childhood experience of the library be an exciting, stimulating and enjoyable one. However, parents are reminded that the Library is a heavily-used public facility where staff cannot be directly responsible for unattended children, nor are they able to monitor children and a child's experience in a public place. Younger children should not be unattended in their library use, because of the public nature of the library facility and the library staff's legal inability to act "in loco parentis." Two staff will engage in any safety interaction with a child. This policy is drafted for the protection and safety of child users and the guidance of parents/caregivers.

1. Children Using the Library:

- Children under the age of 10 must be attended (accompanied and directly supervised) at all times by a responsible caregiver, including during Library programs per Massachusetts General Law 119, Section 39.
- "Attended" means that the responsible caregiver is on the same level, maintaining visual contact and verbal control of the child.
- A responsible caregiver is defined as a person age 13 or older who is entrusted with the care of a minor child.
- With the exception of library-run Book Clubs, caregivers must attend programs with their youngsters under the age of 10, understanding that library staff cannot be responsible for individual children, especially in a large crowd situation. During preschool story hours, at all times and for all age sessions, caregivers remain responsible for their children and must be present in the Youth Services area.
- Children age 10 or older may utilize the library without an attending adult/caregiver, solely at the discretion of a responsible adult, for the period of time needed to select materials, complete a homework assignment, or attend a library program. Children must have the contact information and know how to reach a parent, guardian or caregiver in case of an emergency; both adult and child must be aware of library hours. If a child is left unattended for an unreasonable amount of time, caregivers will be contacted.
- All ages at all times must comply with the Library Code of Conduct.
- Staff may contact the Westford Police Department if a parent or guardian of an unattended child cannot be located.
- In the event of a medical emergency when a parent or guardian is not with the child, staff will contact the Westford EMT's and Fire Department and then the parent or guardian, in that order.

2. Caregivers Attending Programs/Meetings, Researching at the Library, etc.:

- Caregivers attending adult programs or meetings at the library should expect that any children under the age of 10 will accompany them to these events. Caregivers engaged in research may need to seek out a librarian to provide the best site for balancing research and responsibility for the child.
- It is strongly recommended that caregivers whose youngsters are attending non-library functions within the library facility, accompany their children into, and out of, the presence of the responsible adult party overseeing that function/meeting.

3. Unattended Adults in Children's and YA Spaces and Programs:

- Adults may visit the Children's Room and YA Space only when accompanied by children using those departments or retrieving materials for research or checkout. Unaccompanied adults who are retrieving materials for research or check out may not remain in the Children's Room or YA Space to review the materials, but instead should take them to the adult section of the library to review. Unaccompanied adults may be asked by library staff to use the facilities, services and equipment in the adult section of the library or be ushered from Child and YA programs dependent upon staff assessment. This policy reflects the library's concern for the safety of children in the library.

4. Unattended Minors at Closing Time:

- Should a youngster under the age of 16 be left unattended and stranded at the library after closing hours, staff will follow the SAFETY AT CLOSING TIME POLICY (excerpted below):
 - Two staff persons will remain with the minor to handle the situation (the Building Supervisor and his or her designee, or the two staff with the most seniority)
 - Library staff will attempt to call the parent/attending adult; if the staff cannot reach a parent/attending adult, they will remain with the minor within the library entrance for 15 minutes after closing time.
 - After this time period has elapsed, the two staff will contact the Police Station and request that an officer come and assume responsibility for the minor and accompany him/her to the Police Station.
 - An Incident Report Form will be filled out and submitted to the Director, so that the parent/attending adult may receive a copy of this policy, and understand the actions taken.
 - An ongoing or recurrent problem with a specific family may require further action. Under no circumstances will Library staff transport or accompany the minor from the library grounds.
 - This policy shall be posted in the Library, and filed at each workstation, and verbal reminders to unescorted minors shall be part of normal closing procedure.

Approved by the Board of Library Trustees 11.19.2015; 7.8.19; 4.3.23; 6.5.23.