

## **Unattended Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy**

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- Child – a person nine (9) years old or younger.
- Vulnerable Adult- a person over the age of 18 years who may be unable to protect themselves from abuse, harm or exploitation, which may be by reason of illness, age, mental illness, disability or other types of physical or mental impairment.
- Premises – inside and outside areas of Library property.
- Responsible caregiver – a parent, guardian, or other person, 14 years or older, who takes responsibility for a child, has emergency contact information, stays within visual contact of the child, and remains in the child's immediate vicinity.

We urge responsible caregivers to remember that the library is a public building and it is not in any child or vulnerable adult's best interest to be left here unattended. When children or vulnerable adults are left alone, they may become frightened or anxious. If they wander through our building, they may encounter hazards such as doors, heavy furniture or electrical equipment. They may also become bored and restless and could disturb the enjoyment of other patrons.

The safety of children and vulnerable adults left alone in a library building is a serious concern of the library staff and the board. The responsibility for the safety and behavior of children and vulnerable adults in the library rests with the responsible caregiver and not with library personnel. Library employees cannot be responsible for children or vulnerable adults who are unattended or demonstrating inappropriate behavior.

It is the responsibility of responsible caregivers to:

- Stay at the library and provide direct, continuous supervision (in the same area of the library and within eyesight) of children younger than 9 years of age OR ensure that any caregivers with whom they leave their children are sufficiently responsible to provide care and are at least 14 years of age. Children between the ages of 4 and 8 may attend library programs without a responsible caregiver but the caregiver is expected to join the child immediately following the program.

Caregivers are also expected to remain immediately reachable should an issue arise during any library programs.

- Ensure that vulnerable adults receive the care and supervision they require to be safe and healthy while visiting the library.
- Encourage positive behavior of any patron in their care while in the library or attending a library program.
- Cooperate with library staff if any patron in their care is disruptive or if they interfere with or endanger others.
- Provide a means of transportation away from the library by the time the library closes.

Children and vulnerable adults are not allowed to run, become loud and disruptive, use vulgar and inappropriate language, damage library property, treat library staff disrespectfully or interfere with the use of the library by other patrons. Should this happen, library staff will attempt to contact the responsible caregiver first. If the staff are unable to reach a responsible caregiver, the Webster County Sheriff's Office will be notified to take custody of the child or vulnerable adult.

Disruptive children or vulnerable adults will be asked to leave the building after receiving a second warning. If the disruptive child is under 9 years-old and no responsible caregiver is in the library, the staff will attempt to locate the responsible caregiver by telephone and require that an adult take the child from the library immediately. The Webster County Sheriff's Office may be called to provide assistance. More than one such occurrence, or the inability of the parent to provide immediate assistance, may result in suspension of library privileges of the child or parent(s) of the child at the discretion of the Director. If the child or vulnerable adult is attending a library program without a responsible caregiver they will be asked to not return to programming until they can behave appropriately or until their responsible caregiver can stay and supervise them.

If unattended children or vulnerable adults are left at the library for more than sixty (60) minutes after normal or weather-related library closings, library staff will attempt to contact the responsible caregiver first. If the staff are unable to reach the responsible caregiver, the Webster County Sheriff's Office will be called and the child or vulnerable adult will be given into their custody. Under no circumstances will a staff member

leave a child or vulnerable adult alone outside after closing or take the child or vulnerable adult with them.

The Library Board and staff respects the rights and privacy of all library patrons. Library staff will only intervene if children or vulnerable adults are left unattended and problems of safety, disruptive behavior, or well-being occurs. The Board and staff also wish to assure parents that all means of contacting an unattended child or vulnerable adult's responsible caregiver will be exhausted before calling the Webster County Sherriff's office. The contacting of the sheriff's office will be a last resort.