

BEHAVIOR POLICY & PROCEDURES

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BEHAVIOR POLICY & PROCEDURES

A. INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

The Whitman Public Library aims to insure high quality, professional service to all its patrons. The Library serves the community most effectively when everyone conforms to the following guidelines. Those who fail to conform will be required to leave.

This policy recommends procedures to insure the safety and well-being of patrons and staff alike. Our goal in creating this document is to make the library a safe and pleasant facility and to outline the steps staff should take in different situations. It must be emphasized, however, that some situations which may make staff or patrons uncomfortable involve no violation of law or regulation. These situations must be tolerated with good humor and courtesy. Staff should deal with problem behaviors in the same manner that they would like to be approached: with courtesy, tact, calmness and, most of all, common sense. All staff members are expected to use their best judgment in situations not addressed in this policy, and all staff should be familiar with and able to articulate library policies as well as explain the rationale behind them.

B. DEFINITION OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Problem behavior is any behavior that either consciously or unconsciously violates or restricts the rights of others to use the library; prevents library employees from doing their jobs, or jeopardizes the safety of library users, staff and/or property.

C. STANDARD EMERGENCY REPORTING PROCEDURES

In an emergency situation, seconds may mean the difference between life and death. Quick action must be taken to assure minimal damage to persons and property.

- When an emergency or crisis occurs, if there is a supervisor in the immediate vicinity, then that person should contact the relevant safety authorities; otherwise, any employee may make the call. Police, fire and medical personnel all respond to **911** in any emergency. From library phones, dial “9” first for the outside line, then “911.”

- If someone other than a supervisor has notified the authorities of the emergency, the person(s) in charge of the building at that time should then be notified.
- Other staff on duty should then be notified to avoid repeated calls to authorities.
- An Incident Report should be completed to document the situation.

D. GENERAL PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- Have a good public service attitude. Staff in public service positions should greet or acknowledge everyone as they enter the library or their respective departments.
- All staff members are responsible for the implementation of this policy. Problem behaviors should be addressed by the first employee to see the infraction, which includes behaviors associated with disruptive youths. Misbehaving children and young adults should be approached by all staff, not just the youth services staff.
- Problems should be addressed in the initial stage. Don't let things escalate to a critical stage before approaching a patron.
- Problems ignored do not go away.
- Remain calm. Think before responding. Be receptive, courteous, gentle, polite, respectful, firm, relaxed, empathetic and nonjudgmental. Don't overreact. Treat everyone the same.
- Approach the individual in question, identify yourself as a library employee, and explain the library policy which is being violated. Assume the patron does not know the rules. Suggest alternatives to their behavior.
- Under no circumstances should library personnel touch or try to restrain a patron as part of a disciplinary action.
- Three strikes and they're out. First, mention the library's rules; second, mention the consequences of their actions; and third, ask them to leave the building for the rest of the day/evening.
- Alert a supervisor and fellow workers as necessary, whenever you've had to deal with a problem patron.
- If possible, get name and a clear description of patron for any follow-up that may be necessary. Complete an Incident Report for any incident requiring police response, where the patron does not acquiesce, or where an incident may be part

- of an emerging pattern of problem behavior. Put everything in writing and keep copies of all documents.
- At shift changes, incoming staff should be informed about any trouble that may have occurred before they came on duty. Potential troublemakers should be pointed out at this time.
 - At the Whitman Public Library, rules are not made, nor should they be enforced, based on age, gender, race, or any other qualifier. Library staff should rule on conduct that is harmful or disruptive to others, and staff should make it clear to the offending patron that it is the behavior that is causing the eviction and that he/she is welcome in the library when his/her behavior conforms to this policy.
 - Call the police if there is a crime occurring, even if the victim doesn't want you to contact the authorities.
 - The safety of both library patrons and staff is our overriding concern. In the event of an emergency, and the situation warrants it, clear everyone from the immediate area.
 - Trust your instincts, and always err on the side of safety. If a situation makes you feel uncomfortable, then proceed with caution. If an exchange turns into a confrontation, back off and call for assistance. If you feel threatened, call the police immediately using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.
 - We do not expect or encourage staff to try to deal with a problem situation single-handedly. If you are uncomfortable or uncertain about approaching a problem situation, take a co-worker.
 - These procedures are suggested guidelines. If you have a problem, bring it to the attention of your supervisor. If she/he is not available, then ask the next most senior or experienced staff member nearby for advice. It is very likely that they know the problem patron or their history and can quickly defuse a situation.
 - If you ask a patron to leave the library for any reason, inform all staff as soon as possible.
 - Staff should be aware of cues from the public regarding problem behavior. Often staff may not notice a problem that other patrons will notice. If they are reluctant to directly report the behavior, they may attempt to do so indirectly by glaring at library employees (in effect questioning why no corrective action is being taken), clearing their throats, or otherwise calling attention to themselves to demonstrate their exasperation.

- Staff should recognize that the library has some areas where quiet is more strictly enforced (adult side of the building), and areas where conversation is better tolerated (the foyer, main floor and youth services areas). When addressing noise problems in the quieter areas, the offending persons should be encouraged to move to one of the less quiet areas. Persons seeking an all-quiet area should be directed to the study rooms.

E. GENERAL BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

- **ANIMALS:** Bringing animals into the library except those needed to assist a disabled person is not allowed.
- **AUDIO EQUIPMENT:** Playing audio equipment so that others can hear it is not allowed.
- **BICYCLES:** Bicycles must be parked in designated areas outside the building.
- **CELL PHONES:** The use of cell phones is tolerated within reason. Loud voices and ring tones that may be disruptive to others may prompt library employees to request cell phone users take their phones out to the foyer, or shut them off.
- **COMPUTER EQUIPMENT (MISUSE OF):** The abuse of library computer equipment violates the law (MGL, Ch. 266, Sec. 100) and will be prosecuted. Abuse of equipment includes banging on the keyboard or other use of excessive force, misappropriation of hardware or software, and attempts to alter the software. Consult the Library's policy on "Acceptable Use of the Internet and Library Public Computers" for a more comprehensive description.
- **CUDDLING:** Excessive displays of affection are inappropriate behavior for the library.
- **DAMAGES:** Those who damage or deface library materials or property will be prosecuted (MGL, Ch. 266, Sec. 100). Parents can be liable for damage done by a child under the age of eighteen (MGL, Ch. 231, Sec. 85).
- **DISTURBANCES:** Creating a disturbance by making noise, talking loudly, or engaging in other disruptive conduct is not allowed (MGL, Ch. 272, Sec. 41).
- **FEET:** As a safety precaution, patrons must have shod feet on library property.
- **FOOD AND DRINK:** Because of the potential damage to library materials, food and/or beverages are not allowed in the library, except at designated times or in designated rooms. Patrons may consume food outside and then return to the library.

- **INTERFERENCE:** Interfering with another person's right to use the library or with the library staff's performance of their duties is not allowed.
- **LIBRARY FURNITURE (MISUSE OF):** In order to maintain clean and attractive library facilities and furniture, it is forbidden to sit on tables or ledges, place feet on furniture, lie on floors, or to deface walls and shelving. Patrons should sit one to a chair and should not tip back.
- **LOITERING:** Loitering on library property is not allowed. Staff is required to exercise discretion with regards to what is considered unacceptable loitering behavior. In general, the determining factor will be whether the offending party prevents others from enjoying the library. Staff should be careful not to use this provision as a means of age discrimination.
- **PERSONAL POSSESSIONS:** Personal possessions should not be left at public service points for safekeeping. The library is unable to guarantee the security of such items.
- **PROPERTY:** This policy focuses primarily on activities inside the library facility; however, the scope of its coverage is all library property, including the walks and parking areas. The public sidewalks along Webster and School Streets are beyond the routine responsibility of library policy; however, violations of any law or code should be reported to the police as appropriate.
- **REST ROOMS:** Misusing the rest rooms (i.e. using them as a laundry or washing facility) is not allowed.
- **RUNNING:** Running is not allowed in the library building.
- **SKATEBOARDS AND ROLLER SKATES:** Patrons may bring these into the library while they look for materials; however, they may not be used on library property.
- **SLEEPING:** The library is not a hotel. Habitual sleepers, noisy sleepers and those who are sprawled on furniture or the floor in a manner that is disturbing to other persons will not be tolerated. Library users who simply doze off for a short time should ordinarily be left alone. Discretion should be used in approaching a sleeping patron. Do not touch or shake them. Tell them they must remain awake or they will be asked to leave.
- **SOLICITING:** Soliciting patrons and staff for donations or for the purpose of obtaining signatures on petitions is not allowed in the library.

- **STAFF ONLY AREAS:** Patrons are not allowed to enter areas posted “Staff Only” without permission.
- **SUICIDE:** Staff should treat all threats of suicide seriously and immediately report them to the Police.
- **THREATS:** Threatening behavior including, but not limited to, violence, threats of violence, and possession of weapons is not allowed.
- **TOBACCO:** Smoking and the use of tobacco products is prohibited in the library (see MGL Ch. 270, Sec. 21-22).
- **TRUANCY:** Truancy is a school problem, not a library problem. Library staff does not have any responsibility to report persons who seem to be truant; however, if when addressing other behavioral problems it becomes evident the patron involved is truant, the library may report the truant to the appropriate school department contact.

F. COMPLAINTS

- Listen carefully to the patron's question or complaint.
- Speak in a relaxed tone, and repeat and paraphrase what the patron has said. If the complaint is reasonable and legitimate, attempt to resolve the problem. If the complaint involves another staff member, state sympathetically that there must have been a misunderstanding and attempt to resolve the problem.
- If there is a justifiable need for an exception, and you have the authority, make one.
- If the request/complaint is against library policy, and if an exception cannot justifiably be made, explain the library policy clearly. Give an explanation of its rationale. If necessary, show a written copy of the policy to the patron.
- Be pleasantly firm and calm. Do not argue or appear fearful. An indifferent, uncaring attitude is destructive. Stick to the issue and do not get sidetracked with special circumstances.
- You should feel that your job is to obtain for the patron what she/he wants if it is possible within the reasonable limits of existing library policy. If it is not, always try to give them another option (i.e. “We can hold this book for you until you return with the necessary identification.”) Refer the patron to your supervisor or to the Director if you cannot resolve the problem.

- If the Director is unavailable, an appointment may be set up or the patron may make the complaint in writing on the library's Patron Complaint Form.
- Be sure it is not your behavior, attitude or body language that is causing the patron to show heated emotions. Perhaps there is a "personality clash" between you and the patron. Sometimes people rub each other the wrong way quite unintentionally. If this happens, bring a co-worker in to help resolve the impasse.
- Try not to personalize their anger, impatience or frustration.
- If the patron's behavior becomes disruptive and interferes with the operation of the library or others' rights to use the library, follow the procedures below for Disruptive Behavior.

G. DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior may include excessive noise, physical altercations, pranks, foul language, excessive chattiness, running, individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and other behaviors that disturb patrons.

- As noted in the General Procedural Guidelines section above, patrons creating a disturbance are first advised of library policy. They are given a subsequent warning, told of the expected behavior and the consequences of continued misbehavior. If the undesired behavior continues, the patron should be asked to leave the building.
- If an individual does not stop the improper behavior, or does not leave the building when asked to do so, staff should call the police. Tell the police you are calling from the library, give your name, and briefly describe the incident. Emphasize that help is needed.
- If a staff member judges a disturbance too serious to handle alone, they should call for a backup from co-workers and a supervisor.
- So long as demonstrations and briefly disruptive pranks (i.e. "Tarzan" yells, sprints down hallways, etc.) do not occasion more than a momentary distraction to library users, do not interfere with library operations, or jeopardize the safety of persons or the library collection, they should be tolerated with good humor.
- At the discretion of the Director, repeat offenders will be banned from the library for varying lengths of time. For example, a second offense may receive a one week ban, with a third offense receiving a one month ban and a letter sent to the person to document the ban. For minors, letters will be sent to their parents. The Director may use his or her discretion for longer banishment in more serious cases

- or offenses [see Suspending a Problem Patron from the Library attached to this policy statement].
- If a group is involved, try to identify the leader or instigator of the action and deal with that person away from the group.
 - Occasionally groups accompanied by a counselor exhibit problem behavior. Address the offending person(s) first. If that does not lead to corrective action, take the matter up with the counselor. The library should not tolerate any more from a supervised visit than it would from a group unsupervised. Ask for the name of the counselor and the agency from which the group comes.

H. CIVIL DISCOURSE:

It is the library's expectation that all discussions between patrons and staff, whether in the library, by telephone, or any other means of communication, shall be conducted with courtesy and mutual respect. Neither staff nor patrons should accept rudeness, insulting language, profanity, or raised voices from one another.

Patrons receiving such behavior should report it immediately to the supervisor of the service department and/or complete a patron complaint form for submission to the Library Director. Staff receiving such behavior should complete an incident report for submission to the Library Director. Patrons who habitually use rudeness, insulting language, profanity, or raised voices in library transactions will be subject to progressive disciplinary measures that may include temporary or permanent banning from use of the library.

I. ABERRANT BEHAVIOR / MENTALLY DISTURBED

This type of behavior typically results from psychological problems, illness, or substance abuse. If it is not disruptive to library operations or to other patrons, then it should be tolerated so long as no violations of law and policies occur. Actions of persons exhibiting such behavior range from merely having an odd manner to disruptive and even dangerously violent behavior. Diverse physiological and/or neurological symptoms can cause the affected individual to appear socially aberrant. For example, diabetics may have an alcoholic smell when suffering from shock. Tourette's Syndrome can be identified by occasional uncontrollable outbursts including the use of foul language. Emotionally disturbed persons may be suffering from mental illnesses or disorders characterized by somewhat bizarre external behavior, hallucinations, and delusions. They can be withdrawn, timid, uncooperative, or violently aggressive.

- Always look for a medical alert tag on the wrist or around the neck.

- If these persons are able to use the library and do not require assistance, do not treat them any differently than other patrons.
- Persons who are mentally ill experience a different reality. Their judgment is different -- sometimes slower to kick in, and often their boundaries are blurred.
- Staff should expect persons with mental illness to conform to library policy, and the library needs to establish boundaries. Mental illness is not an excuse for unacceptable behavior in the library. When limits are set, be sure to follow through.
- If it appears that these persons need personal assistance, ask if you can be of help. If they appear to be ill, offer to call the paramedics, or a family member.
- If you suspect a patron is disturbed, ask for help from a co-worker if necessary and practical before approaching the patron.
- Do not laugh at, point at, humiliate or be critical/judgmental. Be polite, empathetic and firm.
- Never argue with the individual.
- Do not endorse or contradict a person's hallucinations or delusions.
- Offer choices (i.e. "You may speak loudly elsewhere, but if you wish to remain in the library, you must observe our rules.")
- If someone behaves suspiciously, and you suspect drugs or excessive alcohol, alert other staff members. Judgment should be exercised in the case of people who smell of alcohol. If the patron's behavior is not otherwise offensive, then there is no problem. If, on the other hand, the patron is loud or obnoxious, she/he should be told that they're disturbing other patrons and "would they please be a little quieter." If the problem is more than just loud talking, then, depending upon the problem, the patron may be asked to leave the building. Request police assistance if necessary, following standard emergency reporting procedures.
- Be discreet and maintain a nonjudgmental attitude. Do not make the person feel watched or cornered. Keep a safe distance, allowing her/him space to easily leave the building.
- Library employees should not act in roles they are not trained for or which are inappropriate for the setting (i.e. as a personal counselor, social worker, substance abuse counselor).

- If the person cannot function effectively, ask if they need help. If the person refuses medical help, and they cannot control their disruptive behavior, they should be asked to leave. At the first sign of dangerous behavior, call the police, using standard emergency reporting procedures.

J. VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

- Violence can often be predicted. Stay alert to the signals.
- Warnings for violent behavior include:
 - Agitation
 - Hostility
 - Throwing things
 - Drunkenness
 - Furtiveness
 - Raising voice
- Persons are more likely to assault people like themselves: same age, gender, etc.
- Your own instinctive fear of an individual is a warning of impending violence that should be heeded. Remain calm. Aggression breeds aggression.
- If you feel threatened, contact the Police immediately using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.

K. SEXUAL DEVIANTS

- If someone is suspiciously watching or following a staff member or a patron, try to get a general description.
- Alert other staff to the situation.
- Be assertive. Ask if the person needs assistance. In many cases just approaching the individual will discourage them from engaging in the unacceptable behavior. “Do you need help finding something?” or “Is there anything I can help you with?” are examples of what you might ask.
- A supervisor or the Director should then warn the individual that the behavior is offensive and must be stopped, or they will be asked to leave the building.
- If the behavior continues and the person will not leave, call the police, using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.

L. SEX OFFENDER REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Information on registered sex offenders in Whitman can be obtained through the Whitman Police Department.
- Registered sex offenders are not wanted by the police, so employees should not call the police if the offender comes to the library.
- “Sex offender registry information shall not be used to commit a crime or to engage in illegal discrimination or harassment of an offender.”¹ Library employees, therefore, may not discriminate against these people. To the best of their ability, employees should be aware of any offenders in the building and note if they behave in a manner that is potentially dangerous to other library users (i.e., as described in the section on “Sexual Deviants” above).
- Contrary to the procedures outlined in the “Sexual Deviants” section above, if there is any evidence of unacceptable behavior, the employee should not confront the offender, but call the police using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.

M. FLASHERS

- Even though these people are usually non-violent, this is a serious problem that should not be taken lightly.
- If a flashing occurs, remain calm and do not show shock or alarm. These people generally thrive on the reaction they get.
- Get a description of the person.
- Call police, using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.
- If this happens to a patron, offer to call a friend, relative, or neighbor to drive them home.

N. PERSONAL HYGIENE

- Patrons may be required to leave the library if their personal hygiene interferes with the ability of other patrons to use and/or enjoy the facility.

¹M.G.L., Chapter 6, Sections 178C - 178P

- Staff should proceed with caution on this issue. In many cases it is difficult to distinguish between body odor that is a result of poor hygiene and odor resulting from a medical problem.
- If it appears that the patron does not have access to a shower or bathing facility, arrangements may be made through the appropriate organizations listed in the Ready Response Form section of this policy. The library should facilitate this contact, as appropriate.

O. VANDALISM

Library staff members have a responsibility to protect library property. Destroying or damaging library materials violates the law. This includes cutting, tearing, and defacing print and audio-visual materials, damaging equipment and software, defacing walls, damaging facilities, breaking windows. Damage caused by food or drink will also be considered vandalism.

- If staff observe or receive a report that someone is defacing or destroying library property, the staff member should quickly size up the situation and decide the best method of handling it. The staff member should let the individual know that the actions in question are illegal and must stop at once.
- Get a second witness, preferably another staff member. Both witnesses should carefully observe the person's actions and physical description for follow-up if needed.
- Request a name or identification be presented as appropriate.
- If it is determined that the patron has vandalized library property, the incident should be reported to the Director who will discuss means of restitution with the patron or, in the case of minors, their parents.
- If a staff member observes or receives a report that a patron is maliciously destroying library property, and is obviously not approachable, call the police using Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.
- The library retains the right to prosecute anyone who maliciously destroys library property.

P. THEFT

Theft of library materials, use of false identification to obtain a library card, or use of another person's library card without his/her permission are against the law and may

be prosecuted (MGL, Ch. 266, Sec. 99). If the alarm of the book detection system is triggered by a patron leaving the building, staff should:

- Ask the patron to return to the circulation desk.
- Ask if she/he has forgotten to check out any library materials.
- If the person has checked out all their materials, staff will de-sensitize the materials again and check each item to be sure the correct date due has been stamped.
- If the alarm sounds again, determine if the patron has other objects that may trip the alarm (i.e. strollers, briefcase, calculators or keys). If this is the case, allow the patron to leave the building.
- If the patron has "forgotten" to check out materials because she/he does not have a card, explain procedure for obtaining a card and allow him/her to get one.
- If the patron has insufficient identification to obtain a card, offer to hold the materials until closing the next day so that the person can come back and get a library card and the reserved materials.
- Remind patrons of the availability of the photocopy machines, especially in the case of reference materials.
- If a patron is caught purposely removing library materials (under a coat, inside a briefcase, etc.), take down the person's name and address and report the incident to the Director. Borrowing privileges may be revoked at the Director's discretion for a period of time.
- If a patron has a "block" on his/her card because of unpaid fines, allow them the opportunity to pay the fine immediately or, if the fine is over \$5, return to the library at another time when the fine can be paid. No materials may be checked out until unpaid fines and/or missing materials are resolved.
- Consult "Theft" section in the Disaster/Emergency Preparedness Plan.

Q. WEAPONS

- A weapon is defined as a gun, switchblade, unsheathed knife or other dangerous object. Such objects are prohibited on library property. Staff should exercise their discretion when interpreting this section. Pocket knives and pepper spray are examples of objects that for the purposes of this policy would not normally be defined as a weapon, but could be if displayed inappropriately.

- If you suspect a patron may be armed, stay alert, notify your supervisor and the Director, and avoid provoking a confrontation.
- If you have seen that a patron is carrying a weapon, call the police immediately using the Standard Emergency Reporting Procedures.
- If the situation seems imminently threatening, quietly clear everyone from the building immediately.