

YOUTH SERVICES GUIDELINES (A SUPPLEMENT TO BEHAVIOR POLICY & PROCEDURES)

A. INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

The Youth Services staff of the Whitman Public Library strives to create a warm, inviting, fun environment for children and young adults. The library offers many programs and services that encourage children and young adults to develop a love of books, reading and learning. The safety and well-being of children and young adults at the library is of serious concern. It is the intention of this policy to enlist the cooperation of parents and other adults responsible for children and young adults to ensure that the Whitman Public Library provides a safe and pleasant experience for all who use it.

B. TERMINOLOGY DEFINED

- ABUSE: Physical act intended to hurt a child or adolescent, including repetitive slapping, excessive spanking, and arm twisting.
- DISRUPTIVE CHILD: A child or adolescent who is noisy, boisterous or acting out behavior which is inappropriate in the library setting. This includes behavior that presents physical danger to the child or others, or interferes with the legitimate library business of other patrons or staff.
- UNATTENDED CHILD: A young person, age nine and under, using public library resources and facilities unaccompanied by a responsible adult.
- VULNERABLE CHILD: A child under age seven who is not supervised by a parent or caregiver. An unattended child or adolescent whose safety or well-being would be endangered if she/he were sent out of the building. Examples of vulnerability include: a child being too young to be on her/his own; a child or adolescent being sent into an unsafe area; or a child or adolescent being left alone in the dark outside the library after business hours.

C. GENERAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- The Youth Services area serves children and young adults of all ages through grade eight, parents, teachers, some adults with developmental disabilities (with

- prior approval of the Director or Youth Services Librarian), and students who need children's or young adult materials. Other patrons should use the general library collection and facilities.
- Unaccompanied Adults in the Youth Services Area: For the safety of children in the library, adults unaccompanied by children are asked to remain in the Adult sections of the library unless they are actively using the materials or services in the youth services area. Adults who wish to use children's or young adult materials in the library should notify the staff on duty of that need, and take those selections to the main floor.
 - Groups of adults wishing to use children's materials should schedule a visitation time in advance. A collection of children's and young adult materials can be made available for their use in the Adult sections of the library.
 - Use of restrooms in the Youth Services area is restricted to children in grades eight and under, or adults with children. All others must use the restrooms in the other areas of the library.
 - Parents/guardians may not leave children aged nine and under unattended in the library. Older children caring for younger children must be able and willing to supervise the younger ones while in the library.
 - Parents/guardians are responsible for their children's behavior while in the library. Parents/guardians will be notified if their children are left in a vulnerable situation or require supervision due to disruptive behavior.
 - Disruptive children aged nine or over will be asked to leave after receiving two warnings.
 - All incidents of a child being left alone will be recorded by a staff member on the Standard Incident Report Forms.

D. PROCEDURES FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

- A child or young adult who engages in disruptive behavior, whether attended or not, will be told her/his actions are inappropriate and will be asked to stop.
- The librarian should attempt to engage the child or young adult with one of the library's resources, such as books, puzzles, games, homework assistance, etc. Parents are expected to do this for attended children.
- If the disruptive behavior continues, a staff member should inform the parents that their child is disturbing others or is behaving inappropriately.

- If disruptive behavior persists, the child or adult and child may be asked to leave after two warnings have been given.
- If a vulnerable child persists in being disruptive, a library staff person will try to reach the child's Parent/Guardian. The Parent/Guardian will be informed of the problem situation, the library's policy, and will be asked to pick up the child. If the Parent/Guardian cannot or does not come for the child 15 minutes before closing, then the procedures for Unattended Child after Library Hours should be followed.

E. CHILD LEFT UNATTENDED

If it is determined that a child is lost or left unattended, a staff member should try to identify and locate the Parent/Guardian or responsible adult according to the following procedure:

- Walk around the area where the Parent/Guardian was last believed seen. If unsuccessful, check on other areas of the library. If the child is frightened or crying, the staff should try to comfort and reassure her/him. The child should be brought to the staff person in charge of the library.
- Announce the child's Parent/Guardian using the name if known. If no name is available, announce that a child is missing. If anyone claims to have lost a child, ask her/him to describe the child and to present identification.
- When the adult is located, explain the library policy on unattended children.
- If the Parent/Guardian is not found in the building, a staff member should stay with the child until someone can be located through searching the library database, phone book, etc.
- If the Parent/Guardian cannot be located, or if the library is closing, the staff member will call the police.
- Staff should not take a child out of the building.
- If the parent cannot be located and the child must leave (to catch a ride, e.g.), the staff member will give the parent's name, address, and an account of the disruptive behavior on a completed Incident Report to the Director, who will then write the Parent/Guardian describing the incident and informing her/him of the library policy.

F. UNATTENDED CHILD AFTER LIBRARY HOURS

If a child is alone at closing time and appears to be vulnerable:

- A staff member should stay with the child until a Parent/Guardian can be located through searching the library database, phone book, etc. If staff cannot reach Parent/Guardian on the first attempt, the person in charge will call the Police to assume responsibility for the child.
- Two staff members should remain with the child inside the library entrance until the Parent/Guardian or Police arrive.
- Library policy will be explained and a copy of this policy should be given to the Parent/Guardian.
- If there is an ongoing problem with a family, Police Department or Department of Social Services intervention may be necessary. The Director should consult with the town administrator regarding ongoing problems.
- All incidents of a child being left vulnerable should be recorded on Standard Incident Report forms.
- Staff should not transport or take a child away from the library building.

G. CHILD REPORTED MISSING OR LOST

If a Parent/Guardian or caregiver reports a child missing, staff should proceed as follows:

- Obtain the name, age and description of the child.
- Ask Parent/Guardian how extensively they have searched. Check outside the library immediately. Check the library thoroughly, including rest rooms and offices.
- Describe child to and request assistance from all library staff.
- Call Police if unable to locate the child.

H. CHILD ABUSE BY AN ADULT

- If an incident of child abuse is observed or suspected of occurring, staff should intervene to try to distract the adult if it can be done safely.
- Staff should never place themselves physically between the child and the adult.
- Staff should use language that refers to library policy and does not in any way accuse the adult (i.e. “Hitting is not allowed in the library” rather than “You’re abusing that child and you must stop.”)
- If the adult does not cease, and the behavior is abusive, the police should be called.
- Try to obtain the name and address of the adult.
- Complete an Incident Report form.
- Under Massachusetts law (MGL, Ch.119, Sec. 51A), librarians are required to report child abuse or suspicion of child abuse to State Department of Social Services.