

Houston County Public Libraries Safe Child and Dependent Persons Policy

May 2007

Statement of Philosophy

The Houston County Public Library System is committed to providing its users an atmosphere and environment free from unnecessary distractions and conducive to the most efficient use of library facilities and programming. Part of this commitment is a concern for the safety and welfare of everyone who visits our libraries.

Library facilities are public buildings, and as such, have special security concerns. Library staff members have many varied responsibilities, and they are neither trained nor expected to provide care and supervision for children or dependent persons of any age. Dependent persons may include, for example, persons incapacitated due to physical and/or mental disabilities or other conditions who are dependent on others for their safety and well-being. A parent, legal guardian, or caregiver is responsible for monitoring the activities and managing the behavior of children and dependent persons during their library visit. A caregiver is defined as an individual at least 16 years of age who acknowledges this responsibility for a child or dependent person.

Children or dependent persons left unattended may be at risk. There are many factors that could place them in danger. A child or dependent person could be tempted to go off with a stranger, or could become ill. These are just examples of many emergencies that could take place in a public building. It is for the safety of everyone who visits the library that the Houston County Public Library System has adopted this *Safe Child and Dependent Persons Policy*.

Statement of Policy

Parents, legal guardians, and caregivers are responsible for the care and behavior of children and dependent persons at all times while in library buildings. *Children under 12 years of age must remain in the company of the parent or caregiver.*

[A child who is attending a library program need not be accompanied into that program by a parent, unless otherwise indicated. Parents and caregivers must, however, be present in the building during the programming in case an emergency should arise.]

Persons Left Unattended

When Library staff recognizes that a child or dependent person has been left unattended in the library or on its premises, they will attempt to identify and locate the responsible parent, legal guardian, or caregiver guided by the following procedures:

- Staff will search the library building and/or grounds in an effort to locate the responsible party.
- If the responsible party cannot be located, a staff member will monitor the person until the parent, legal guardian, or caregiver returns to the library.
- When the responsible party is located, the *Safe Child and Dependent Persons Policy* will be explained and a copy given to them.
- Staff will record the parent's, legal guardian's, or caregiver's name, address and telephone number and the name of the unattended person.
- Staff will refer any additional incidents to law enforcement.
- **If necessary at any time, staff will contact the appropriate law enforcement or social services authorities to assume responsibility for the welfare of a child or dependent person in need of attention.**

Unattended Persons after Closing Time

Parents, legal guardians, and caregivers are responsible for being aware of the times the Library opens and closes. Library staff must exercise appropriate procedures to ensure the safety of unattended persons, either minors 17 years of age and younger or dependent persons of any age, especially when the library is closing.

- One half hour prior to closing time, staff will make an effort to ascertain that any minors or dependent persons of any age have arrangements for transportation from the library.
- If no ride has arrived by closing time, staff will call the Police Department. Two staff members, one of whom is a supervisor, will remain with the minor or dependent person until the police arrive to take charge of them.
- Staff will record the parent's, legal guardian's, or caregiver's name, address, and telephone number of the unattended person.
- Staff will refer any additional incidents to law enforcement.
- **Under no circumstances will library staff members provide transportation to unattended minors or dependent persons, or leave them alone in the building or on the library premises.**

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