

ST. MARY PARISH LIBRARY
LIBRARY SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL
APPROVED: 3/14/2023

UNATTENDED CHILDREN AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Purpose: The purpose of the Unattended Children and Parental Responsibility Policy is to ensure the safety of children using the library. This policy supports the Library Code of Conduct

Policy Statement: The St. Mary Parish Library welcomes the use of its facilities, materials and services by children of all ages. The library staff nurtures children to develop a love of reading and learning, however, the safety and the welfare of children left alone in the Library is a serious concern of the Library Board of Control and the administration. Children's disruptive behavior can have a negative impact on other Library patrons.

Responsibility: At all times, the safety and behavior of children lie with the parent, guardian or designated caregiver. Library staff are not responsible for any children. This includes times when the parent, guardian or designated caregiver is not present within the library building or on library grounds. The Library is a public building, and the staff cannot always know if children are leaving the facility with parents or strangers, or even by themselves.

Library staff will determine whether a child's behavior is inappropriate and will respond to such situations individually, as outlined in the Library's Code of Conduct Policy. Parents, guardians and/or designated caregivers are responsible for any actions, including, but not limited to monetary responsibility for property damage or loss caused by their children under the age of 18.

An incident report must be completed by any staff member who asks a child to leave the library due to behavior.

Supervision: For the protection and well-being of children who use the Library and to prevent undue disruption, the following rules have been adopted by the St. Mary Parish Library Board of Control:

- For children ages 4 and under, the parent must remain in the immediate vicinity of and in visual contact with the child. A parent, guardian or designated caregiver must be present at library programs with children 4 and under.
- Children 5-10 years of age may independently browse inside of the library but may not be left alone in the Library or on library property. Children aged 5-10 can independently attend library programs but caregivers must remain on library property during the program.
- Children aged 11 and older may visit the library and attend programs independently. Children must abide by the rules stated in the St. Mary Parish Library Code of Conduct.

Parents, guardians or designated caregivers are responsible for their child's behavior while in the Library.

- If a child 10 years of age or under is left unattended in the library or on library property, the staff will attempt to contact his/her parents or caregiver (if applicable) by phone. If no parent or caregiver arrives within 10 minutes, the local police or St. Mary Parish Sheriff's Office will be contacted. The Library reserves the right to contact the police and/or sheriff's department at any time, if the situation warrants.

An incident report must be completed by any staff member who calls the police or a parent/caregiver about an unattended child.

- All children must be picked up by a parent or caregiver by the time the Library closes. When the library closes, all users must exit the building. No child under the age of 14, unless accompanied by a sibling 14 or over, will be left alone on library property. Any child under the age of 14, not accompanied by an older sibling, will be required to call the person in charge of picking him/her up no less than 15 minutes before closing. After waiting at least 5 minutes after closing, the local police or sheriff's office will be called to pick up and safeguard the child in their custody. Under no circumstances should staff take the child home or transport them to another location.

An incident report must be completed by any staff who must wait with a child after closing.

- Children under 18 may not use public internet computers without a parent or caregiver present unless they fit the age requirement of 11 years old or older and they have an active library card registered in the St. Mary Parish Library system. Children ages 14-18 without a parent or caregiver present who do not have a library card will not be issued a guest pass.