

UNATTENDED CHILDREN AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

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UNATTENDED CHILDREN

I. Rationale

The happiness and safety of young children left alone at MPL can be a serious concern. Very young children have been left at the library for extended periods. They may be able to occupy their time for a short while, but, being children, they soon become bored and restless, disturbing the enjoyment of others and, worse yet, possibly compromising their safety. It is not the library's intention to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasonable response prepared when problems occur.

2. Policy Statement on Age

A. Children seven years old or younger must be attended by a parent or a responsible child care provider while in the library. If the "responsible child care provider" is an older sibling or relative, he or she must be of an age and maturity level to be able to provide care for the age and number of children being accompanied.

B. Children ages five and younger who are visiting the library but not attending a program must be at all times under the direct supervision of a parent of responsible child care provider. Adults using Internet stations or browsing adult library collections may not leave children ages five and younger unattended in the Youth Department while they pursue their own activities.

3. Policy Statement on Unattended Children, Ages seven and younger

If determined that a child aged seven years old or younger is lost or left unattended, a staff member will first attempt to locate a parent or care provider within the library. If a responsible care giver cannot be located, staff will attempt to locate the child's guardian at home or at work. If the child's guardian or care giver cannot be located within a reasonable period of time or if the library is closing, staff will notify the Marshalltown Police Department so that a parent or responsible care provider can be found. Under normal conditions, unattended children seven years old or younger should not be transported in a staff member's car or be left outside the building when the library is closing. In all instances, the Youth Services Supervisor or Library Director will write a letter to the child's parent(s) or guardian detailing the incident and explaining the library's policy.

4. Special Considerations, Unattended Children, Ages eight and older

Library staff feel special concern for children and their welfare. If the Library is closing due to inclement weather or because it is scheduled closing time, staff members are often reticent to let young children stand outside the library building to wait for a ride home. If a staff member feels that a child should not be left to wait, two staff members may wait with the child for a short time in the library's lobby.

After a reasonable time, staff will notify the Marshalltown Police Department and will wait with the child until police arrive.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

1. Rationale

All library patrons, whether they are children or adults, will be required to conform to the guidelines established in the library's posted "Appropriate Behavior Policy." Children will be treated with the same courtesy and respect afforded any library patrons, but they are expected to behave in a manner that does not diminish others' enjoyment of the library.

2. Attended Children

- A. A staff member will ask the child to correct his or her behavior.
- B. If after one warning the child's disruptive behavior continues, a staff member should inform the parents that the child is disturbing others.
- C. If the parent refuses or is unable to correct the child's behavior, he or she will be warned that further noncompliance with the library's "Appropriate Behavior Policy" will result in expulsion from the library.
- D. If the problem persists, the child/parent will be asked to leave the library for the day. If difficulties arise, the Police Department may be called to assist in this procedure.

3. Unattended Children, Ages seven or under

- A. A staff member will ask the child to correct his or her behavior.
- B. If after one warning the child's disruptive behavior continues, the child will be told to sit quietly at a table in the Youth Department. Youth Department will be notified of the directive.
- C. The Youth Department or other staff member should seek to locate the child's parent(s) or care provider and notify them by phone both of the library's policy on unattended children and of the disruptive behavior. The parent(s) or care provider should be instructed to immediately collect the child from the library.
- D. If a parent or care provider cannot be located and disruption continues, staff will notify the Marshalltown Police Department so that a parent or responsible care provider may be found.
- E. Under normal conditions, unattended children seven years old or younger should not be transported in a staff member's car or be left outside the building when the library is closing.
- F. In all instances, the Youth Services Supervisor or Library Director will write a letter to the child's parent(s) or guardian detailing the incident and explaining the library's policy.

4. Unattended Children, Ages eight and older

- A. The definition of “Unattended children, ages eight and older” will be left to the discretion of the staff member dealing with disruptive behavior. Single or groups of young teens who visit the library are often more appropriately handled according to the guidelines for adult patrons.
- B. All library patrons, including children, are expected to comply with the library’s “Appropriate Behavior Policy.”
- C. If a child, eight years old or older, does not comply with the library’s guidelines for appropriate behavior, a staff member will ask the child to correct his/her behavior.
- D. If the child persists, he or she will be told to sit quietly at a table in the Youth Department. The Youth Department will be informed of this directive.
- E. Youth librarians or other staff member will warn the child that further noncompliance with the library’s “Appropriate Behavior Policy” will result in expulsion from the library.
- F. If the child refuses or is unable to comply with the “Appropriate Behavior Policy,” he or she will be directed to leave the library for the day. The child will be given an opportunity to call home for a ride; he may wait in the lobby area for his ride to arrive. All service desks will be informed of the expulsion. If a child refuses to leave, the Marshalltown Police Department will be called.
- G. At the Youth Services Supervisor or the Library Director’s discretion, the parent(s) or guardian of a disruptive child may be informed of the incident and the library’s behavior policy.