

## **Unsupervised and Unattended Children Policy**

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

This policy is intended to be a guideline to staff and to establish enforceable boundaries regarding the behavior of children in a public place. However, it is necessary to exercise professional judgment, as each situation is different. Enforcement based on age alone, for example, or on the measurable distance of the parent from the child in the building, is not a good use of the policy. The circumstances of each family's actions while using the public library should be taken into account. See "procedural examples" at the end of this policy, which provide guidance in this area.

The staff of the Cornelius Public Library occasionally experience behavioral problems with children who are not adequately supervised or are left unattended in the library. The following policy shall apply:

- Persons using the library are required to produce identification upon request by library staff.
- Children under the age of ten shall, at all times, be attended and adequately supervised by a parent, another adult, or a responsible adolescent while using the libraries to find materials or to study.

When children are not adequately supervised or are engaging in behavior that is disturbing others or the operation of the library, the library staff will attempt to locate the person in charge of the children and discuss the problem. Should behavior which violates the library's *'Rules of Behavior'* Policy continue on that or later occasions, staff have the authority to ask the children and the person in charge of the children to leave the premises. If the person in charge of the children under the age of ten cannot be located, the children will be referred to law enforcement personnel for their own safety.

- Children aged ten to eighteen are responsible for their own behavior. When they are engaging in behavior that is disturbing others or the operation of the libraries, the problem may be discussed with them at the time. Should the behavior continue on that or later occasions, staff have the authority to ask them to leave the premises.
- During library programs, persons responsible for the activity and behavior of children aged five and younger should remain in the activity area with the children. Persons responsible for the activity and behavior of children aged six to nine may leave the activity area during library-sponsored programs but should remain close at hand. If responsible parties find it necessary to leave the activity area, the children should be provided with a note concerning how they may be reached in case of an emergency, and the responsible parties are required to return by the time the program is scheduled to be over or law enforcement personnel may be contacted for the safety of the children.

## PROCEDURAL EXAMPLES:

Each situation is different when dealing with the actions of children and their families.

*“Under the age of ten”* is a guideline, but there are times when exceptions should be made.

- An eight-year-old girl is sitting reading in the children’s area while her mother is browsing through the new adult magazines.

*No action needed. The child’s behavior is appropriate and the mother is in the library close to the child.*

- A ten-year-old boy is being disruptive, noisy and rowdy, in the children’s area. His parent is nowhere to be seen.

*Staff should approach the child, ask him to be quieter, and perhaps suggest some alternative activity. If the behavior continues, locate the person responsible for the child, explain that his behavior is causing disruption and request increased supervision.*

*Could cite the general ‘Rules of Behavior’ policy as necessary.*

- A two-year-old is about to rip pages out of a picture book. The parent does not appear to be anywhere close. However, the parent appears from the juvenile non-fiction stacks once the staff person approaches the preschooler and removes the materials from them before further damage occurs.

*Staff should intervene before the materials are damaged. Chat with the parent about the need for close supervision at this age and offer alternatives such as board books or stuffed animals.*

- A six-year-old girl has been left in the children’s area alone for 20 minutes, has become bored and is beginning to be disruptive.

*Approach the child and find out where her parent or responsible party is. Explain to them that closer supervision is needed since children often misbehave if left to their own devices too long.*

- An eight-year-old child is repeatedly left alone in the children’s area while her parent uses the Internet computers. She is routinely well behaved.

*Locate and remind the parent of our policy regarding young children’s supervision. If the problem persists over a long period of time, try to find out more details about the family (name of both child and adult, perhaps a library card number, etc.), document the events, provide the parent with the Policy on Youth Safety and discuss it with him/her so s/he is aware of the safety issues involved in the situation, and provide a summary report to the Library Director. If the child’s behavior deteriorates or becomes repeatedly demanding of the staff’s time, the situation calls for stricter intervention and we would*

*have to become more strict with the parent. If the child's behavior remains appropriate, staff have done what is required by making the parent aware of our policies.*

- It is very rarely that patron behavior necessitates serious intervention, but the policies do cover these circumstances, up to calling law enforcement. Examples might be:
  - A seven-year-old child is discovered alone in the library at closing time and reports that his parent was to have picked him up at 8:00 p.m. but has not arrived. Our *Unsupervised and Unattended* policy states that we will turn the child over to law enforcement personnel.
  - A teenage youth is behaving erratically and is being extremely disruptive. If a responsible party could not be contacted, the situation would merit law enforcement intervention, especially if the teen became belligerent.