

UNATTENDED CHILDREN

Policy Statement

The Bucks County Free Library (“BCFL”) welcomes children of all ages to use its materials and services. However, because library staff members have many duties and cannot/will not supervise children nor act as a substitute for daycare, the general responsibility for the care, safety, and behavior of children lies with parents/guardians or caregivers, both in library buildings and on library grounds. The library staff may not take responsibility for the care of any child, and the library is not responsible for any child left unattended.

Regulations

Children of any age who exhibit disruptive, destructive or potentially harmful behavior will be subject to the policies and procedures set forth in the library’s Behavior Policy and Regulations.

A child aged 6 and under may never be left alone at the library even for a short period of time. They must be accompanied and the parent/guardian or caregiver must remain within sight and conversation distance of the child at all times. A caregiver is an individual aged 13 and over who is assuming responsibility for a younger child with the permission of the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s). This may include, for example, siblings, babysitters, or teachers.

A child 7, 8 or 9 years old need not be in the immediate presence of a parent or caregiver at the library, but the parent/guardian or caregiver of the child must be somewhere in the library at all times.

A child aged 10 and over may use the library unattended for an amount of time appropriate to his/her age and maturity, subject to the child complying with the BCFL’s Behavior Policy and Regulations.

While these regulations are age specific, BCFL reserves the ability to modify these regulations and apply them differently to certain children on a case-by-case basis. For example, the library staff could review a situation and determine that a certain 10-year-old child cannot be left unattended.

Procedures in the Event of Unattended Children

If a child aged 9 and under is found unattended while the library is open, library staff will attempt to locate the parent/guardian or caregiver in the library. If the parent/caregiver cannot be found, law enforcement officials will be called, and the child will be placed in their care.

If a child aged 10 and over has become ill or frightened, has become disruptive and will not respond to verbal warnings from library staff, is upset because of weather conditions, long hours out of contact with the parent/guardian or caregiver, or other special circumstances, parents/guardians not in the library will be contacted, if possible, by library staff, informed of safety concerns, and asked to immediately pick up the child. If the library staff is unable to contact a parent/guardian, law enforcement officials may be called, and the child may be placed in their care, depending upon the circumstances.

Closing Due to Inclement Weather or Closing Time: Under no circumstances will a staff member give a child a ride home, take a child outside of the building, or remain in the building alone with an unattended child.

If a child aged 9 or younger is left unattended when the library is closing because of inclement weather or closing time, law enforcement officials will be called, and the child will be placed in their care. Two library staff members will wait with the child until law enforcement arrives.

Children aged 10 and older will be encouraged by library staff to call and arrange rides home from the library at least 30 minutes before closing because of inclement weather or closing time. Children will be permitted to use the library telephone (or to have staff phone for them) to request to be picked up from the library. If at closing time a parent/guardian has not arrived to pick up the child, law enforcement officials will be called, and the child will be placed in their care. Two library staff members will wait with the child until law enforcement arrives.

Parents/guardians and caregivers of children of any age left unattended and without transportation at regular library closing time will be sent a letter, signed by the branch librarian, and expressing the library's concern for the child's safety and well being. A copy of the letter will be submitted to the Public Services Director.

Internal Documentation: All occurrences will be documented by staff using an Incident Report Form.

Consequences of Violations of This Policy

When discussing/warning a library user about violations of the library's Unattended Child Policy and Regulations, library staff will provide a written copy of this Policy to the library user.

A member of the public who violates the Unattended Child Policy and Regulations will be subject to any of the following steps depending upon the severity of the violation(s):

- Asked to stop the behavior;
- Receive a verbal or written warning;
- Be banned from the library for one or more days; or
- Be required by the library to resolve the matter with assistance from social/family services and/or law enforcement.

The Branch Librarian will work with the Public Services Director to contact the parent/legal guardian in writing and follow up with social/family services if it is habitual.

Repeated violations with repercussions beyond expulsion from the library premises for more than one day will be handled by a team leader, supervisor, or duty officer.

Library users may appeal any actions taken by library staff to enforce the Unattended Child Policy and



Regulations by submitting a written request to the Bucks County Free Library Board of Directors; 150 South Pine Street; Doylestown, PA 18901-4932.

Truancy

Children age 10 and over unattended in the library during school hours will be approached by a library staff member and asked to show written permission that they are allowed to be in the library during school hours.

Miscellaneous

The Unattended Child Policy and Regulations is posted on a bulletin board in each facility. Copies of the policy and regulations are available for distribution as needed at each service desk.

Approved and Adopted at the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors April 16, 1996
Revised October 16, 2007 (Former Title "Children & Their Use of the Library")