**Children**

 **5/14/12**

**MASON COUNTY M. BEVEN ECKERT MEMORIAL LIBRARY**

**Policy: Unattended and Disruptive Children Policy**

**BACKGROUND:**

The Mason County M. Beven Eckert Memorial Library welcomes the use of its facilities and services by children of all ages. Our services and programs are offered to make the library inviting to children, to encourage them to visit the library, and to develop a love of books, reading, and libraries.

Because the library is an open, public building, the safety and welfare of children left alone in the library is a serious concern. Young children, left unattended, can become frightened and anxious. Even older children, though they may be able to occupy their time for a short while, often become bored, hungry, and restless which can lead to disruptive behavior that interferes with library business of other patrons and staff. Library staff cannot know if unattended children are leaving the building with parents or strangers or by themselves.

For the protection and well-being of children and to prevent undue disruption of normal library activities, the Mason County M. Beven Eckert Memorial Library Board has adopted a policy statement concerning unattended or disruptive children.

**POLICY PROCEDURES:**

**Children aged 11 and under are not left unattended at the Library.**

Children ages 11 and under are accompanied by a responsible adult—an adult is defined as a person 16 years of age or older. Parents/caregivers are responsible for their children’s behavior while in the library, on library grounds, and while attending library programs. Parents or caregivers remain in the building while their child is attending a story time or other program. If a child is left unattended in the library, the staff attempt to locate the parent or caregiver. If the parent or caregiver is not located within 30 minutes, the sheriff’s department may be contacted to pick up the child.

 The public library is an open, public institution where all patrons have an equal right to quality library services in a safe, relaxed environment. If a child is being disruptive or is visibly ill, the staff suggests that the parent use the foyer or Stribling Room to read or use a laptop. Staff ask a child to be quiet or to use “an inside voice” or to stop disruptive behavior. If the child continues disruptive behavior, staff tell the child and/or parent to leave the library.

**POLICY PROCEDURES:**

**Self-supervised children, ages 12 and up, are welcome to use the library unattended, as long as they display acceptable library behavior.**

For safety’s sake, parents make sure that their children are sufficiently mature before allowing them to visit the library by themselves. Parents are advised that if their children display disruptive behavior, the staff call the

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parent, and the child is told to leave the library. Parents, even in their absence, are legally responsible for their children’s behavior.

**The library assumes no responsibility for an unattended child—even for a very short time—before, during, or after library hours.**

Staff staff are not placed in the position of supervising children who are too young to be unattended, or whose behavior indicates that they have stayed at the library for too long a time.

**POLICY PROCEDURES:**

**Unattended Children at Closing**

Children are to be picked up before closing time. Youngsters left to wait outside for a ride after the library has closed are placed in a vulnerable position. It is not the intention of the Mason county M. Beven Eckert Memorial Library to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasoned response prepared if necessary. The library respects the privacy of patrons and intervenes only when, in the opinion of library staff, the safety and well-being of a child is threatened. If staff has reason to suspect that a child has been left at closing time, staff ask the child if he/she is waiting to be picked up, determine the child’s name, and call the child’s parent. If the parent cannot be reached or the transportation does not arrive within fifteen minutes, the sheriff’s department is called (325-347-5252) to assume responsibility for the child. Two staff members remain with the child for 15 minutes after closing until the parent or law enforcement arrive. If law enforcement removes the child from the library premises, staff leave a note on the door notifying the parent/caregiver.

Staff members use their judgment when dealing with unattended youth at closing, but the library staff does not under any circumstances transport or take the child away from the building.

In any situation involving youth safety and specifically whenever parents/caregivers or law enforcement personnel are contacted, staff will complete an Incident Report to be given to the librarian, with a copy to be filed at the library.

In order to institute this policy, signs are posted in the library building as follows: “While in the library, children 11 and under must be accompanied by an adult. At library closing time, a parent or guardian whose child has not been picked up is telephoned. If there is no response to the call, the sheriff’s department is contacted.” Relative information will also be published in the local newspaper before the policy is implemented.

Approved 5-14-12