

Newtown Public Library
Unattended Child Policy

Adopted by the Newtown Public Library Board of Trustees on 12/20/2022

The Newtown Public Library works to create a safe and welcoming environment for children. In the interest of every child's safety, the Library will not assume responsibility for caretaking or supervision of children. The Library is a public facility and is frequented by many people every day. The Library is not a childcare provider, but a public institution where all users have an equal right to quality services in a safe and relaxed environment.

The following policies are designed to guide the use of the Library by parents and their children.

- Children and young people who are disruptive in the Library or on Library grounds interfere with Library service to all users and can be asked to leave.

A Library Incident Report (LIR) should be completed by any staff member who asks a child to leave the library due to behavior.

- Parents may not leave children under 10 years old alone in the Library or on library property and are responsible for their children's behavior while in the library. For children 5 and under, the parent must remain in the Children's Department and be visible to the child.
- A parent or caregiver must be present at library programs with children 4 and under. Children aged 5 – 10 can independently attend library programs but caregivers must remain on library property during the program in case the child experiences separation anxiety, becomes ill, or displays inappropriate behavior during the program.
- Children aged 10 and older may visit the library and attend programs independently. Children must abide by the rules stated in the Newtown Public Library Rules of Conduct.
- If a child under 10 years old is left unattended in the library or on library property, the staff will attempt to contact his/her parents or caregiver by phone. If no parent or caregiver arrives within 20 minutes, the Newtown Township Police Department will be called. The library reserves the right to contact the Newtown Township police at any time if the situation warrants.

An incident report should 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 in the lobby, or standing on the sidewalk to wait for a ride. At closing, the Newtown Township Police 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 should be completed by any staff member who must contact the police about a child in the library or waiting in the lobby or on the sidewalk after closing.

- Children under 18 may not use public internet computers without a parent or caregiver present unless they have a library card registered in the DCLS system. Children under 18 who do not have a DCLS-registered library card will not be issued a guest pass and library staff may ask to see a library card of any individual thought to be under 18 who is using a public internet computer. As the Early Childhood Learning PCs are not internet enabled, they are reserved for children under 12 years of age.

Steps to Take with Unattended Children

Child Left Unattended During Open Hours

If it is determined that a child is lost or left unattended, a staff member should try to identify and locate the parent/caregiver, according to the following procedure:

1. Children left unattended are often frightened and crying and should be reassured by the staff.
2. Walk around the area with the child, looking for the parent/caregiver and informally asking for assistance. Often other people in the area can provide information.
3. When an adult is located, gently remind him/her about the Library policy on unattended children. For example, "The Library thinks it's important that an adult stays with a child under age 10."
4. If the parent/caregiver is not found in the building, a staff member should stay with the child until someone can be located, through searching Sierra or online.
5. If, after trying, the parent/caregiver has not been located, the staff member will call the police. Explain to the child that no-one is in trouble but that we want to make sure the child gets home safely.
6. Under no circumstances will a staff member take the child out of the building.

Child Left Unattended at Closing

At twenty minutes before closing, check the library for unattended children (under 14), and make sure they have a ride home. Help them all call a caregiver, if needed.

1. Check through the building to locate the caregiver.
2. If the parent/caregiver is not in the building, at least one staff member should stay with the child, while another calls the Newtown Township Police. Explain to the child that no-one is in trouble but that we want to make sure the child gets home safely
3. Under no circumstances will a staff member take the child out of the building.

Child Reported Lost or Missing

If a parent/caregiver reports a child missing, staff will follow this procedure:

1. Obtain name, age, and description of the child.
2. Get staff assistance in locating the child, or page the child, depending on his/her age. Provide a name and/or description of the child. Watch exits.
3. Check all areas thoroughly, including bathrooms, offices, and the elevator.
4. Check outside the Library.
5. Call the police (911) if unable to locate the child.
6. If the child is found, let other staff know.

Timelines and actions may vary with the maturity of the child, the time of year, the weather, and staff availability. The goal is to be helpful and to keep library patrons safe.