

Columbia County Library

POLICY STATEMENT - VISITS BY YOUNG CHILDREN TO THE LIBRARY

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

A child is a person younger than 10 years of age.

A youth is a person aged 10 through 17.

A dependent person is a person who needs a caregiver for safety and/or other reasons. Dependent persons include persons incapacitated due to physical and/or mental disabilities or other conditions and who are dependent on others for their safety and well-being.

A caregiver is an individual who accepts and acknowledges the responsibility of care for a child, youth, or dependent person. This may be a parent, legal guardian or other person temporarily responsible for the care of the person.

Welcome and Statement of Responsibility

The Columbia County Library welcomes children and encourages their frequent use of the library's resources. The Trustees and Staff want to provide a safe and appropriate environment for children and all library users to enjoy the library's resources, and to participate in library programs. It is our desire to make this visit an important, memorable and enjoyable learning experience for the child.

Library staff members are trained to help children with library materials and services but are not legally allowed to provide supervision for children. Parents are reminded that they or their designated caregivers, not library staff, are responsible for the behavior, comfort and safety of their children visiting the library. Library staff will not provide childcare for unsupervised children in the library. Please make sure your child comes to the library with a responsible person.

All children are subject to library building rules and regulations.

Age limits

It is library policy that all children under the age of 10 must be accompanied by a responsible adult while in the library. If the child is attending a library program, we require the responsible adult to remain in the children's area throughout the program. Children age 10 and older may be left unattended at the discretion of a parent/caregiver, but should not be left for more than one hour.

A child is considered unattended if he/she is not accompanied by a designated caregiver at least sixteen (16) years old. Caregivers must remain within sight of all children under the age of 10. Library staff is not responsible for the safety of unattended children.

For safety reasons, children under 10 should be accompanied by a parent/caregiver on the elevator and stairs.

Guidelines for Parents and Staff

The parent/caregiver is responsible for the child's behavior in the library, at library programs and on the library grounds. To insure the safety and fair use of the library by all users, running, shouting, pushing, and prolonged crying over two minutes or other disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. (See Patron Behavior Policy).

If the library staff determines that a child's behavior disrupts other people's use of the library, he/she will ask the parent or guardian to quiet the child or stop the disruptive behavior. If after a reasonable amount of time, the behavior continues, the parent/guardian will be asked to take the child to the lobby (or outside if this is a branch without a lobby.)

Library staff members will also take the actions outlined below in these or similar situations:

- A child is alone and frightened or crying in the library.
- A child is alone and doing something dangerous or another person in the library seems to be a danger to the child.
- A child is alone and is not following library rules.
- No caregiver comes to pick a child up at closing time.
- Any child under the age of 10 is alone in the library.

Library staff members will evaluate the situation and try to contact the child's parent or guardian. If staff cannot reach the parent or guardian, they will place the child in the care of the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

Closing:

One half hour before closing, library staff will check with all children appearing to be in the library alone to verify that they will be picked up before closing. At this time, children are allowed to use the library telephone to contact parents to arrange transportation. If an adult cannot be contacted, and no one arrives to transport the child at closing time, two library staff members will remain with the child until transportation arrives. If transportation has not arrived within 15 minutes, the staff will call 911. When police arrive they will take charge of the child/children. (we can also walk the child up to the substation or call the non-emergency number 706-541-2800)

Consequences of Policy Violations:

Parents/guardians who misuse the library will be contacted, and use of the library by their child/children may be forfeited for a period of time.

Computer use

Children under 5 years old may use a computer only under the direct supervision of a parent or caregiver. It is the responsibility of a parent or caregiver to ensure appropriate use of computers by children. Pounding on keyboards and other potentially damaging activities are not permitted.