

FORT BEND COUNTY LIBRARIES

UNATTENDED CHILDREN POLICY

The library is a public building, and as in all public places, it is not safe for young children to be left alone. Although children and adults are equally welcome at Fort Bend County Libraries (FBCL), responsibility for the safety, well-being and behavior of children while on the premises of the library rests with the parent, guardian or caregiver, and not with the library staff. Neither the library nor library staff assumes the role of a parent, known as *in loco parentis*, nor do they assume the role of a daycare or childcare provider.

Many materials, programs and services are offered to make the library enjoyable for children and to help them develop a love of books, reading, and libraries. However, when children are left unattended at the library, any number of problems may arise. Young children may become frightened, tired, bored, or disruptive. Children who are left unattended in the building may encounter potential hazards such as stairs, electrical outlets, or automatic doors, to name a few. If an unattended child has a medical emergency, the library staff cannot take legal responsibility, other than to call 911.

There may be times when the library must close due to an emergency such as a storm or power outage. In such instances, library staff will be on the alert for any child in need of assistance and will make every effort to contact a responsible adult. However, staff members are prohibited from transporting children in their vehicles. Additionally, "Stranger Danger" is a serious concern in any public setting, including the library. Library staff have no way of knowing if a child is interacting with or leaving the building with a stranger.

It is the intention of this policy to enlist the cooperation of parents and other adults responsible for children, to ensure that Fort Bend County Libraries provides a safe and pleasant experience for all who use it. To that end, Fort Bend County Libraries has adopted the following policy:

- Library staff members are not responsible for the care or supervision of children at any time.
- Children under age 12 may not be left alone or unattended in the library at any time.
- A parent, guardian or caregiver aged 14 or older must accompany a child under the age of 12 at all times, while in the library.
- The parent, guardian or caregiver is responsible for the behavior and supervision of any child under age 12 in their care while at the library and, therefore, must be in the immediate vicinity of and in visual contact with the child during the length of the library visit.

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Unattended Children Policy

- An exception to this policy may be allowed when children attend a library program without a parent/caregiver in the room. In this situation, parents, guardians, and caregivers are expected to remain in the library building and immediately reunite with the child when the child leaves the program.
- Children 12 years old and older may use the library without being accompanied by an adult. Parents, however, are still responsible for the actions and safety of their children under the age of 18. Parents who wish to limit or restrict the reading, viewing, or listening of their own children must personally oversee their children's selections.
- All children are subject to the rules listed in the Rules of Conduct Policy. The failure of any patron, including children, to comply with FBCL policies will result in their removal from the library.
- In the event library staff becomes aware of any child under age 12 left unattended while on library premises, staff will attempt to contact the parent, guardian, or caregiver. If contact cannot be made, library staff may report the situation to the police.

*Approved by
Commissioners Court
May 24, 2016*

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