

CHILDREN IN THE LIBRARY

The Rahway Public Library welcomes children of all ages; however, Library staff cannot assume responsibility for any unattended child in the Library.

As in all public places, “stranger danger” is a serious concern. Consequently, a caregiver should not confuse the feeling of relative safety in a Library with the objective reality of the Library as a public place and Library staff cannot prevent children from interacting with or leaving the Library with any person(s). Unlike school personnel, the Library staff does not act in loco parentis for children who are in the Library. The Rahway Public Library affirms the parent’s or caregiver’s responsibility for the safety and behavior of the child(ren) in their custody.

The Board of Trustees of the Rahway Public Library adopted this policy to maintain a safe environment for children while in the Library.

Definitions.

“Appropriate Caregiver” refers to a parent, guardian or caregiver aged 14 or over.

“Unattended Child” refers to a child of any age who is apparently not accompanied by an Appropriate Caregiver.

A child **aged 8 years of age and younger** must be in the immediate vicinity (within sight or conversation distance) of an Appropriate Caregiver at all times.

A child **over the age of 9 years of age but younger than 12 years of age** may be under the indirect supervision of an Appropriate Caregiver as long as the Appropriate Caregiver is in the library and provided that the child observes the **Rules of Conduct Policy**.

Children **aged 12 years of age and older** may use the Library without supervision provided the child observes the **Rules of Conduct Policy** and carries the telephone number of an Appropriate Caregiver who can be contacted in case of emergency.

A child of **any age** with mental, physical or emotional conditions that require supervision must be continually accompanied by an Appropriate Caregiver.

Children of any age who are unable or unwilling to care for themselves may not be left alone in the Library or on Library grounds at any time and must have adequate supervision from an Appropriate Caregiver.

When a Library staff discovers an Unattended Child, the Library staff member will initiate the following actions:

Attempt to contact the Appropriate Caregiver of the Unattended Child to apprise them of the situation.

If the Appropriate Caregiver is located in the building, the Library staff member shall explain the Library’s policy on unattended children and expect the Appropriate Caregiver to comply.

If the Appropriate Caregiver is not in the building and is reached by telephone, the Library staff member shall request that the Appropriate Caregiver join the child at the Library immediately if the child is under 12 or is not observing the Rules of Conduct.

If the Appropriate Caregiver is not in the building and cannot be reached by phone, the staff member shall call the Rahway Police to take charge of the child. Two staff members shall remain with the child until the police arrive.

Violation of Rules of Conduct Policy; Library Closing. In the event that an Unattended Child of any age violates the **Rules of Conduct Policy** in a manner that requires expulsion from the Library, or if the Library is closing (whether at closing time or due to an emergency situation) within thirty (30) minutes, Library staff will follow the actions outlined for Unattended Children and attempt to contact the Appropriate Caregiver. The Appropriate Caregiver will be required to come to the Library to remove the child from the premises as soon as possible but in any event within the earlier of (i) thirty minutes, or (ii) the Library's closing time. If the Library staff is unable to locate or contact an Appropriate Caregiver, or if the Library is closing and the Appropriate Caregiver has not arrived, Library staff will call the Rahway Police to take charge of the child. Two staff members shall remain with the child until the police arrive.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect. New Jersey is a mandatory reporting state. This means that any Library staff having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse and/or neglect must report concern(s) or findings immediately by telephone or otherwise. The report should be made to the Department of Children Protection and Permanency (Formerly the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS)) at its centralized call center at (877) – NJ ABUSE or (877) 543-7864. This call center operates 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Under no circumstances shall a staff member take a child out of the building, provide transportation elsewhere, or walk the child home.

Approved: Rahway Public Library Board of Trustees – July 27, 2021