

**Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System
405 West Washington Street
Greenwood, MS 38930
662-453-3634**

Child Safety Policy

I. Introduction

The Library Board of Trustees and Staff of the Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System want children who use our library branches to perceive the library as a warm, welcoming, and fun place to visit. We hope that all families will take advantage of the resources the Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System has to offer. The Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System and its branches exist to provide materials and services designed to help patrons of all ages obtain information meeting their personal, educational, and professional needs. Special emphasis is placed on supporting students at all academic levels and on stimulating young children's interests and appreciation for reading and learning. It is hoped that once the fun and pleasant association with the library is established, it will remain for life.

The happiness and safety of young children left alone at the library can, however, be a serious concern. A public library is a public building, and as such, it could be a dangerous place for children left alone. For example, library staff cannot always know if children are leaving the building with parents or with strangers. Young children left alone at the library at closing time could find themselves just a few feet away from a busy street, and therein, a potentially dangerous situation. In order to create an environment of safety and maintain an atmosphere where reading and study can be encouraged, the Library Board of Trustees has adopted the following policy with regard to the safety of children and their behavior in the library system's branches.

II. Unattended Children

The Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System is NOT responsible for unattended children. While the library system encourages children of all ages to visit our libraries, the libraries do NOT provide babysitting services nor assume any parental responsibilities for children while they are at either library. Parents and caregivers are responsible for monitoring their children's safety, activities, and behavior while visiting the libraries, whether the child is attending a library program alone or is accompanied by the parent. Parents, who are otherwise occupied in the library themselves, whether using library resources, including time spent on public computers or attending library programs, are responsible for their children's behavior and safety at all times during their family's visit to the library.

The purpose of this policy is to inform parents and guardians that the libraries do NOT assume responsibility for their children and to provide guidelines to be used by staff in the event that a child is left unattended at one of our libraries; therefore, for the protection and well-being of all people who use the Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System, but especially for children, the following supervision requirements have been established:

- A. Children, regardless of their age, are expected to conduct themselves in a manner which shows respect for library property, staff, and other patrons using the library.
- B. Children **under the age of three** must always be in close proximity and within sight of the adult responsible for their safety.
- C. Children **between the ages of three and nine** must be directly supervised by a parent or responsible caregiver at all times while in the library, including times when parents or responsible caregivers are using public computers. Parents or caregivers must remain in the same area of the library as the child, unless the child is attending a library program, in which case they must remain in the library building. Dropping off children at the library, with the expectation that the library staff will provide some level of supervision for children **under the age of ten** is unacceptable and may result in the police being called.
- D. Children who are **ages ten & older** may be left unattended providing they are mature enough to follow library rules and observe proper conduct. Such children are subject to the same rules of behavior as adult library patrons and the same consequences, including being asked to leave the library. Parents are still responsible for the actions and safety of their children, and children should know how to reach a parent, guardian, or caregiver.
- E. Children **of any age with mental, physical, or emotional disabilities which affect decision-making skills or render supervision necessary**, must be accompanied by a parent or caregivers at all times.
- F. Children **under the age of 16** (driving age) who are left unattended at closing time may be deemed at risk.
- G. Parents, guardians, or caregivers should be aware that behavior of children, at times, can be disturbing to others using the Library. In this event, library staff may request they temporarily remove their children from the library or a child who is unaccompanied by a parent, guardian, or caregiver may be asked to leave the library.

Additionally, parents, guardians, or caregivers should be familiar with the libraries' hours of operation and should not leave children at either library before the library is open, after the library closes, or for extended periods of time. The libraries' hours are:

Greenwood-Leflore Public Library:	Monday – Friday, 8:30 AM – 5:30 PM Saturday, 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM (noon)
Jodie Wilson Branch Library:	Monday – Friday, 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Parents, guardians, or caregivers should always pick up children at least 30 minutes before the library closes. In case of a delay, children should have an alternative plan, such as calling a family member or a neighbor for a ride home. The responsibility for the safety and behavior of children in the library rests with the parent, guardian, or caregiver and NOT THE LIBRARY STAFF.

III. Vulnerable Children

The Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System respects the privacy of all library patrons and will intervene only when a child appears to be at risk. The **Vulnerable Child** is any unattended child of any age who is deemed by the staff to be at risk. Once a vulnerable child comes to the attention of library staff, every reasonable effort will be made to contact the parent, guardian, or caregiver directly; however, if the parent, guardian, or caregiver cannot be reached, the situation with the vulnerable child will then be referred to local law enforcement.

Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System staff members will use the following definitions when making determinations and decisions concerning this policy:

- **Unattended Child** is any young person unable to care for themselves while using the public library, generally found unaccompanied by a responsible adult.
- **Vulnerable Child** is any unattended child whose safety or well-being would be endangered if he/she would be sent out of the building. Examples of endangerment include the child being too young to be on his/her own, the child left alone in an unsafe area, being left alone in the dark, or being left alone outside the building after business hours.

Further, any child left unattended in the library in violation of this policy, or any child of any age habitually left unattended, may be deemed to be at risk. In such situations, library staff may contact local law enforcement and/or child protective authorities who will thereafter be responsible for the safety and well-being of the child.

Parents, guardians, or caregivers of children not picked up at closing time are to be given a copy of the libraries' hours of operation and a copy of Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System's Child Safety Policy. If a parent, guardian, or caregiver of a child cannot be contacted or located within 15 minutes after the library's closing time, the Greenwood Police Department will be contacted to take custody of the child, following the Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System's staff procedures.

Parents, guardians, or caregivers are responsible for the behavior, safety, and supervision of their children at all times in the library and on library premises. Parents, guardians, or caregivers should teach their children to take care of themselves in public places, including how to deal with strangers, what situations are dangerous, and what to do if they feel threatened.

IV. Staff Procedures and Responsibilities for Unattended or Vulnerable Children

Children left unattended are often frightened and crying and should be verbally comforted by staff. If it is determined that a child is lost or has been left unattended, a staff member should try to identify and locate the parents, guardians, or responsible caregiver:

- A. The staff will walk around the library with the child looking for the parent, guardian, or caregiver.
- B. The staff will announce the name of the child's parent, guardian, or caregiver in the library building if known, or the child's name if known.
- C. If the parent, guardian, or caregiver is not found in the building, the staff member should stay with the child until such a responsible person can be located through searching the library's records, phone book, city directory, etc.
- D. When the parent, guardian, or caregiver is located, they will be informed of the library's policy and asked to join the child at the library or to pick the child up immediately. If they are unable to come immediately, they will be told their child may stay until they come this time, but they must adhere to the library's policy in the future.
- E. When the parent, guardian, or caregiver arrives or when he or she is located, he or she will be provided with a written copy of the library system's Child Safety Policy as soon as possible in order to discourage this situation from happening again.
- F. If the parent, guardian, or caregiver has not been located within one hour (while the library is open) or if the library is closing for the day, within 15 minutes after the library's closing time, the staff member shall call the police, who will assume responsibility for the child.
- G. The staff member will wait inside the library entrance with the child until the parent/caregiver or police arrive.
- H. If the parent/caregiver arrives before the police, library policy will be explained and a written copy of the Child Safety Policy will be provided.
- I. The staff member should call the police to inform them that they need not come after all.
- J. If the police do take responsibility for the children, give the officer who responds a written copy of the Child Safety Policy for the police to provide to the parents.

Under no circumstances will library staff transport or take a child away from the library.

In the case of medical emergency, emergency services will be notified, and **then** the staff will attempt to contact the parent, guardian, or caregiver in that order.

V. Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is any behavior on library premises, indoors or outdoors, that infringes on the rights of other patrons using the library. Disruptive children, of any age, will not be allowed

to interfere with library service to other patrons. Disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to:

- Engaging in unauthorized physical activities; examples:
- running inside or outside the building, shouting, playing tag, wrestling, gymnastics, playing in the planters, riding bikes, skateboards, scooters, etc. in front of the library entrance;
- Damaging library property, including books;
- Harassing another patron or the library staff;
- Abusive language;
- Threat of violence.

VI. Staff Procedures and Responsibilities for Disruptive Children

Disruptive children will be approached by Library staff in the following manner:

- A. Library staff will give a **first** verbal warning to the child indicating that his or her behavior is disruptive to other library patrons and is unacceptable.
- B. If the disruptive behavior continues, the parent, guardian, or caregiver will be given the same warning. If the child is unattended, the child will be given a **second** warning.
- C. If the disruptive behavior still continues, the parent, guardian, or caregiver will be requested to escort the child from the library premises. If the child is unattended, staff should use discretion in asking the child to leave, taking into consideration the child's safety.
- D. If the disruptive behavior continues, and the child refuses to leave the library premises, the police will be called.

If possible, a second library staff member should be present for every warning after the first. Library staff should document any incidents involving disruptive children and inform the library director or his/her representative. In all instances, the director or representative must be informed before appropriate action is taken. The judgment of the library director prevails when requesting the removal of a child from library premises in the event of disruptive behavior.

Adopted by the Administrative Board of Trustees of the Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System on January 30, 2015.

Recorded in its minutes on January 30, 2015 by Jenniffer Stephenson, Director, Greenwood-Leflore Public Library System.