Safe Child Policy

The Polk County Public Libraries (PCPL) welcome children to enjoy its services. Library staff is committed to helping children develop a love of reading and learning. We want all children to have a positive experience each time they visit the library.

Library staff strive to provide safe, welcoming, educational, fun spaces for people of all ages. The libraries are, however, public buildings and safety cannot be guaranteed. It is the responsibility of the caregiver to ensure the safety of their children both within library buildings and on library grounds.

(For ease of reading, the word "child" refers to all child and teen users; the word "caregiver" refers to the parent, grandparent, guardian, teacher, or other individual responsible for the child.)

Responsibilities of PCPL Staff

- PCPL staff is present to serve the public, and cannot monitor the location, safety, or behavior of each child.
- Because the children and teen areas are primarily for children, staff may approach adults in these areas who appear to be unaccompanied by children to inquire about the purpose of their visit. Such inquiries are meant to ensure that all visitors are safe.
- Staff will enforce all PCPL policies up to and including asking children and/or caregivers to leave the facility.
- In accordance with NC GS 14-318.6b effective December 1, 2019, Library staff shall report suspected abuse to appropriate local law enforcement and to the Polk County Department of Social Services at 828-894-2100.

Responsibilities of Caregivers

- Caregivers are responsible for the safety, behavior, and care of their children at all times, even if they are not present in the building.
- The PCPL Customer Conduct Policy applies to all customers, regardless of age and we expect all children, whether attended or unattended, to be mature enough to meet these expectations.
- No child age 9 or younger should be left unattended by a caregiver. See "Unaccompanied Children" below for more guidelines.
- Caregivers should be aware of PCPL's hours of operation and arrange for their child's transportation before the close of the location.

Unaccompanied Children

- While at PCPL, children age 9 or younger must be accompanied by a caregiver. Children age 7 or younger must be directly supervised at all times. If a caregiver cannot be located, the police or Department of Social Services will be contacted to provide care.
- Caregivers should be at least 14 years old and mature enough to follow PCPL rules and guidelines. We suggest young caregivers carry emergency contact information.
- Children age 10 or older may visit the libraries unattended, at the discretion of a caregiver. Unaccompanied children must be mature enough to follow library rules and attend to their own safety. We suggest that these children carry emergency contact information with them.
- Organized groups of children, such as school classes, day care groups, and tours, must be supervised by a person age 18 or older at all times while at PCPL.
- Unaccompanied children who do not follow the Conduct Policy may be asked to leave the premises if, after a warning, the behavior continues. Children may call a caregiver before being required to leave the library.
- Both child and caregiver should be aware of PCPL hours of operation and arrange for transportation before closing.
- Beginning 15 minutes before closing, staff will ask unaccompanied minors if they have arranged to be picked up by closing. If not, the child or staff will immediately contact the caregiver to arrange pickup by closing.
- If a child has not been picked up by closing, staff will contact the appropriate authorities and remain with the child until the authorities arrive.
- Under no circumstances will library staff transport children or accompany them home.

Teen Spaces and Programs

- Library teen spaces and programs are designed to serve young people grades 6-12.
- Teen spaces are not anti-adult, but they are pro-teen. We want to allow teens to be expressive and comfortable. This is why we ask that those below the 6th grade or over the 12th grade limit their visits to browsing the collection and to dropping off or picking up a teen.
- Adults (other than library staff, volunteers, and presenters) are not allowed in the meeting room/program area during teen events. This allows teens to feel safe and comfortable in an environment without unfamiliar adults, as well as giving caregivers confidence that their child will only be interacting with their peers. Caregivers are welcome to stay in another area of the library during teen programs.

Approved by the Board of Trustees of the Polk County Public Libraries and Polk County Commissioners

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