

Panhandle Public Library Cooperative Service Unattended Children Policy

The Panhandle Public Library Cooperative Service Libraries are dedicated to providing a welcoming and safe environment for customers of all ages. Sharing this environment with other people requires that everyone follow The Library Code of Conduct established by the Cooperative Library Board of Trustees and posted in each library building and on the Library website.

The Panhandle Public Library Cooperative Service wants children to use its facilities and services. Children in the library should always be accompanied by a parent/guardian or assigned caregiver.

When children are left alone they may become frightened or anxious. If they wander through the building they may encounter hazards such as stairs, doors, furniture or electrical equipment. They may also become bored and restless and could disturb the enjoyment and work of others.

The safety of children left alone in a library building is a serious concern of the library staff. The responsibility for the safety and behavior of children in the library rests with the parent/caregiver and not with the library personnel. Library employees cannot be responsible for children who are unattended or demonstrating inappropriate behavior. The following guidelines will be followed concerning the care and behavior of young library users.

Children up to age 13 must have a parent/caregiver in the immediate vicinity of and in visual contact with the child. The assigned caregiver must be a responsible person and must carry emergency contact information. An exception would be children attending a library program without a parent/caregiver in the room. However, the parent/caregiver is expected to remain in the library building and immediately join the child at the end of the program.

If a child in this age group is found unattended, library staff will attempt to locate the parent/caregiver in the library and inform him/her of the rules. If the parent/caregiver cannot be found, or if the child is found unattended again, the police will be called for assistance.

If a child in this age group violates the Library Code of Conduct, the child and the parent/caregiver will be informed of the rules. If inappropriate behavior continues, the family may be asked to leave the library.

Children age 13 and older may use the library on their own except during regular school hours. (See Truancy, Home Schooled Students). However, parents are still responsible for actions and the well-being of their child(ren). Children using inappropriate behavior may be asked to leave the library. If a child in this age group is not able to leave the library without an adult, he/she should not be in the library alone. This is a particular concern in inclement weather and after dark. All children should have the telephone number of someone who can assist them in an emergency.

Teenagers are treated as adult users. However, they are still legally the responsibility of their parents and should have an emergency contact available.

Truancy

The Panhandle Public Library Cooperative Service will do its best to uphold Florida State laws on truancy, including Florida Statutes Section 9134.13 which states:

"A child may be taken into custody by a law enforcement officer when the officer has reasonable grounds to believe that the child has run away from home or is absent from school without authorization or is suspended or expelled and is not in the presence of his or her parent or legal guardian during school hours. The officer may deliver a truant to an approved attendance center. A suspended or expelled student may be delivered to an approved alternative to suspension or expulsion program or to the parent or legal guardian."

If the child is truant, he/she will be informed of this law before officers are called and will have the opportunity to use the phone to call a parent/guardian for a ride if needed.

Home Schooled Students

In order to use the public library alone during school hours, those who are ages 13 and up and are home schooled, will be required to have a letter with them from the parent/guardian stating the child is home schooled. The letter will include emergency contact information. The parent/guardian will be called by staff to confirm the home school status. The school district may also be contacted to confirm home school status

Closing Time:

Children who do not have transportation home at closing time will be asked for telephone numbers of people who can pick them up at the library. Based on the age of the child, if a child is not picked up within 15 minutes of closing, library staff is required to call the local police. Staff is empowered to stay with children until they are picked up.

Panhandle Public Library Cooperative service policy requires employees to report known or suspected abuse or neglect of children and elderly adults, if such knowledge is a result of employment with the service area library.