

**St. Joseph Public Library
Unattended Minors Policy**

The four branches of the St. Joseph Public Library (SJPL) are public buildings available for use by everyone. The safety and security of children left on their own without supervision in a library building is of serious concern to the SJPL Board of Trustees, administration and staff. For the protection and wellbeing of children who visit the SJPL branches, the following policy is established:

The responsibility to supervise a child using the library rests at all times with the child's parent, legal guardian or designated caregiver*. Library staff has other necessary duties that prevent them from providing a parental level of individual supervision for children using the library. SJPL staff also lacks legal standing to provide such supervision since they may not act *in loco parentis*. When children attend activity programs sponsored by the library they are supervised by SJPL staff only during the scheduled time of the program and only in the room or area where the program is presented.

Because the supervision staff can provide is limited, we strongly recommend that children of all ages be accompanied to the library by a guardian.

Children eight years old and younger must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian or designated caregiver while in any branch of SJPL. Parents, guardians or designated caregivers of children nine years old and older are strongly encouraged to accompany these minor children in the library.

If a child eight years old or younger is identified as unaccompanied, library staff will attempt to reach by telephone the parent or legal guardian for the purpose of explaining this policy and the need to either join their child or pick them up from the library. Otherwise, a copy will be mailed to the parent or guardian.

Parents and guardians should be familiar with the library's hours of operations and should not leave minor children on their own and unsupervised before the library opens or after it closes. Parents and guardians should also be aware that the library may be closed or close early due to scheduled holidays or unscheduled occurrences such as severe weather or other emergencies. Prior arrangements and contingency plans for immediate pick-up in such instances should be determined in advance.

The SJPL district can assume no responsibility for children on library property, who are not physically within the library building at closing time, nor can the SJPL district assume responsibility for children on library property outside the library buildings before opening time.

If minor children of any age are in a library branch at the time of closing and have no means of transportation, the library staff will make a judgment call about the vulnerability of the minor. A vulnerable minor is one who is unattended and whose safety or wellbeing would be endangered by being sent out of a library facility. Examples of vulnerability might include the child's age,

apparent lack of a safe environment outside the library facility or the possibility of a minor being left alone at night outside a library facility after operating hours.

If the minor appears vulnerable, staff will obtain their name, address, phone number and the name(s) of their parent/guardian. Library staff will telephone the parent/guardian and request they immediately pick up the minor(s). Two staff members should stay with the minor(s) until the situation is resolved. Library staff will follow up with letters to the parents explaining library hours and a copy of this policy.

If the minor(s) are not picked up within fifteen minutes after the parent/guardian has been contacted, the library staff will contact the St. Joseph Police Department and report abandoned minor(s), and request the police take custody of the minor(s). Library staff will leave a note securely and prominently displayed on an exterior door to inform the parent/guardian that the minor(s) have been left in the custody of the police, along with a telephone number for the police department.

*A designated caregiver of a minor in this context is an individual who has been charged by a parent or legal guardian with the care of a minor during a visit to the library. Examples could include a teacher, daycare provider or babysitter.