

Children Left in Library	Approved by: Board of Trustees	Date:	03/20/12
		Revised Date:	2/16/16 5/24/21

The Hall County Library System actively encourages frequent visits by children and their families to the library. Children and young adult areas in the library are available specifically for children, their parents, caregivers, teachers and patrons researching children’s literature.

The safety of every child is a top priority. While every effort is made to ensure that the library is a safe and inviting place for children, caretakers must always exercise the same precautions that they use in any public building. A child could become sick, be tempted to leave with a stranger, or panic and leave the building if they cannot find their parent. Library staff cannot be placed in the position of supervising unattended children.

Age that Children Can Be Alone in the Library

Children under the age of 11 must have a caregiver who is at least 15 years old with them **at all times**. Children under 11 must be within sight of their caregiver while in the library. Adults may not leave children under 11 in the care of an older child who is unable or unwilling to provide adequate care. Children aged 11 and older may require adult supervision if they are unable to follow the library’s Public Conduct Policy independently. During popular programs with high attendance numbers, such as a Summer Reading performance, caregivers of children over age 8 may be asked to wait outside the performance area to make room for other children. However, they are still expected to remain close by and supervise their child. Children age 8+ may attend staff supervised programs in library areas without a caregiver present at staff discretion; a caregiver must remain in the library during the program.

No child under the age of 18 can be left outside the library after closing time without an adult.

Unattended Children in the Library Policy

Unattended children are children under the age of 11 who do not have a responsible caregiver aged 15 or older. If a staff member determines that a child under the age of 11 has been left in the library without a caregiver, the following actions will be taken:

- A staff member will ask the child for their parent/guardian’s phone number.
- The staff member will call the parent/guardian and ask that the child(ren) be picked up. An incident report will be completed.
- If the parent/guardian does not come to pick up the child within one hour, local law enforcement will be notified. If the library is closing within an hour of the staff member’s phone call, the procedure for Children/Young Adults Left at the Library at Closing Time will be followed.

Children under 11 Left with a Caretaker

Children under the age of 11 are welcome to be in the library with a caretaker who is at least 15 years old who is willing and able to manage their behavior according the library’s Public Conduct Policy. If inadequate supervision is given, the following actions will be taken:

- The caretaker will be warned about library policy and fulfilling their responsibility to a child under their care.
- If the caretaker does not heed the staff warning, they may be instructed to leave for the day, and may come back with a parent/guardian.
- Staff may obtain the phone number of the parent/guardian of the child and contact them. The parent/guardian may be informed that the child's caretaker is no longer permitted to accompany the child to the library unless a responsible adult is also present.
- Staff will complete an incident report.

After Hours Programs with Children/Young Adults

Periodically, the library will offer programs for children/young adults that are held after library closing time. A parent/legal guardian must fill out an after-hours permission form and arrive by the time the program ends, which will be stated on the form. If the parent/guardian is not present at the designated time, staff may call local law enforcement to ensure that the child gets home safely.

Children/Young Adults Left at the Library at Closing Time

For the sake of safety, no child under the age of 18 can be left outside of the library after closing time without an adult. If a child/young adult is in the library or waiting outside the physical building on library property at closing, the following actions will be taken:

- Staff will ask for the phone number of the child's parent/guardian, or the name and number of an adult who can pick them up, and contact them.
- A minimum of two staff members will remain until the child/young adult has left the premises. Under no circumstances is a staff member to drive the child/young adult home. The only exception to the two staff member minimum is a branch manned by one person.
- If staff is unable to contact the child's ride, or no one has arrived within fifteen minutes of the staff telephone call, local law enforcement will be contacted to ensure the child's safety. Two staff members will remain with the child until law enforcement arrives.
- The adult picking up the child/young adult may arrive after the child has left with law enforcement. Staff will leave a copy of the Notification to Parent/Guardian form taped inside the main entrance facing outwards stating the child/young adult left safely with law enforcement at the time staff had left.
- The library system will make no determination as to the suitability or authority of anyone arriving or being contacted to transport a minor from library grounds or for minors leaving library grounds, and cannot legally detain a child who wishes to leave the property.
- In the case of an emergency closing due to inclement weather or other circumstances, staff will call the child's parent/guardian. If no one has arrived within fifteen minutes of the staff member's call, local law enforcement will be called to make sure the child gets home safely. Parent/guardians should always accompany their minor in the library on days where inclement weather is expected.