



THOMAS
MEMORIAL
LIBRARY

SAFE CHILD POLICY

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

On July 12, 2021, the Town Council voted to approve a number of key changes to library policies, several of which affect children's use of the library after school and on their own. The intent of the policy changes is to ensure that the Town's free public library is a place where any person may come to read, relax, work, and look for books and other information. In particular, the library's new Safe Child Policy was developed to address long standing safety and behavior concerns associated primarily with the use of the library by unaccompanied children after school.

The new policy requires that children 10 and under must be accompanied in the library by a parent or guardian at least 16 years of age at all times. Children 11 and 12 years old may use the library unattended for brief periods of time--not exceeding one hour---provided they demonstrate purposeful intent to use library resources, and that their behavior is not disruptive to other patrons or library staff. Teens 13 and up are welcome to use library resources on their own, again, so long as they are engaged in activities associated with the use of a public library. ***Attendance at library programs, browsing for recreational reading, and use of tables and seating for homework and study are encouraged and considered appropriate use of the library.***

AT A GLANCE

- **AGES 10 AND UNDER:**
Must be accompanied in the library by a caregiver 16 or older at all times
- **AGES 11 & 12:**
May be alone in the library for no more than 1 hour
- **AGES 13 AND ABOVE:**
May be in the library unattended provided they follow the library's general use policy

DID YOU KNOW?

The Thomas Memorial Library is a public municipal facility, not a school facility. Library staff, unlike teachers and school employees, are not authorized or mandated to act *in loco parentis* (in place of the parent.) **Children using the library are not supervised or attended to as they would be in a school setting.** The library is not an appropriate place for children to stay unattended for extended periods of time, including after school while waiting for a caregiver to pick them up.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- If you feel your child is too young to be left at home alone, they are too young to be left at the library alone.
- If you feel your child is too young to leave the library building and wander around town on their own, they are too young to be left at the library alone.

Q&A

Can I send my middle-schooler to the library after school?

Your 11 or 12 year old is welcome to come to the library to use library resources for a short period of time. However, you cannot send your younger middle school student to the library to hang out for the entire afternoon. Teens 13 and older who have a purposeful intent to use the library are welcome to be in the library unattended, but be aware children and teens of any age using the library independently are subject to the same behavior policy as adults, and are assumed to be able to conduct themselves in the library in an appropriate manner without constant supervision or guidance. If they fail to abide by library rules and policies, or exhibit unacceptable behavior, they will be asked to leave.

Why is this policy necessary?

Public library facilities are not designed or licensed to provide basic child care needs or emergency care if a child becomes ill or upset. A public library is a public space open to all ages and all walks of life; library staff do not monitor who comes and goes, when a child leaves the building, or with whom they might leave. Unlike school department teachers and staff, library staff are not responsible for supervising or monitoring the activities and whereabouts of children within the building or on the library grounds. Any public place, including a public library, may be dangerous for a child who is left unattended for long hours or who is left stranded after closing hours.

Who came up with this policy?

The Safe Child Policy was developed by library staff in collaboration with the Thomas Memorial Library Committee (an advisory committee made up of Town-appointed citizens) and in consultation with school staff and administrators. It was evaluated and discussed at two Town Council workshops before the final vote for approval on July 12.

What happens if my child misbehaves at the library?

Children and teens of any age using the library independently are subject to the same behavior policy as adults, and are assumed to be able to conduct themselves in the library in an appropriate manner without constant supervision or guidance. If they fail to abide by library rules and policies, or exhibit unacceptable behavior, they will be asked to leave. Children who continue to be disruptive on multiple visits will be asked to discontinue library visits without a caregiver who can provide the kind of guidance and supervision needed.

Doesn't this policy discourage children from using the library?

The policy is not meant to imply that unaccompanied children are unwelcome in the library; on the contrary, the policy welcomes all children, but implores parents and guardians to work with library staff to assure that the library experience is safe and positive for children and all library users.

If you would like the complete text of this or any of the library's approved policies, please visit ThomasMemorialLibrary.org, or ask us and we'll be happy to provide you a printed copy.