

Safe Child Policy

The Peabody Institute Library welcomes children of all ages and strives to create a welcoming environment where children feel engaged and comfortable to explore, learn, and play. We offer many programs and services designed to foster a love of books, reading, and lifelong learning in all the children who use our facilities. Our children's areas are designed to serve the needs of our youngest patrons, and staff members make every effort to keep the children who use the space safe. However, the Library is a public building and the well-being of children left alone at the Library is a serious concern. The physical makeup of all three of the Peabody Institute Library's locations, particularly the Main Library with its many stairwells, separate rooms, and obscure corners, make it impossible to see patrons at all times. This is especially true of children.

Library staff take their responsibility to provide safe access to the Library very seriously; this safe access applies to all of our patrons, even our youngest ones, equally. **All patrons, regardless of age, are expected to follow the policies outlined in our Patron Rights and Responsibilities.** If a child is unable to comprehend their rights and responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the child's caregiver (i.e., the child's parents, guardians, and/or other person(s) responsible for the child's safety, behavior, and supervision) to ensure that the child is following the Library's policies. **Ultimately, the responsibility for children using the Library rests with the child's caregiver.**

Unattended Children

Children of all ages are welcome to use the Library. **The Peabody Institute Library assumes no responsibility for children of any age left unattended at the Library.** Many children are capable of using the Library independently and should not be discouraged from doing so. **It is the responsibility of caregivers to determine their child's ability to use the Library's services without supervision.**

For the purposes of this policy, an unattended child refers to:

- A child of any age who is in the Library alone OR
- A child whose caregiver is in the Library but not with the child.

Library staff will be guided by this policy in situations including, but not limited to the following:

- A younger child is unattended in the library

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- An unattended child is engaging in behavior that violates the Library's policies or is otherwise disruptive to the other Library users, staff, or the normal operations of Library business: and/or
- A child is unattended at the Library at closing time

In those or other situations involving an unattended child, the following steps may be taken:

- Library staff may attempt to contact the child's caregiver after approaching the child, identifying themselves as a person who works at the Library, and asking if the child knows where their grownup is
- If Library staff attempt to reach a caregiver and a caregiver cannot be reached or if the Library is closing in 15 minutes or less, a staff member will contact the police via the non-emergency number so that the police may assume responsibility for the child
 - Two staff members will wait with the child until law enforcement arrives
- Under no circumstances will a staff member take a child out of the building or transport a child to another location
- Upon learning of a medical emergency of an unattended child, staff will contact emergency services, then the caregiver, in that order.

If any of the steps above need to be taken:

- A staff member with a first-hand account of the incident will file an Incident Report
AND
- A copy of this Safe Child Policy will be made available for the caregiver's review

Caregiver Responsibilities

- Children must be picked up from the Library no later than 15 minutes prior to the Library closing.
 - Caregivers are expected to know the opening and closing times of the Library, bearing in mind that the time can and does change in case of emergencies. Caregivers are encouraged to visit our website: www.peabodylibrary.org for the most current Library hours
- Caregivers are exclusively responsible for what their children see, read, hear or borrow from the Library. **If a caregiver does not want a child to have access to particular spaces, services or materials that the Library contains, the caregiver must guide their child appropriately.**

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- The Board of Trustees adheres to the American Library Association statement that all have the right for equal opportunity to access anything in the Library
- The Library does not have filter software on any of its technology equipment
- Children who have their own library cards and whose accounts are in good standing may borrow materials in accordance with our borrowing rules, regardless of the content of the materials
- **Library staff is NOT a substitute for child care; staff members do their best to keep all patrons safe, but they cannot supervise children**
 - As in all public spaces, “stranger danger” is a real concern; Library staff do not have the authority to prevent children from interacting or leaving with persons who are not appropriate chaperones
- Library staff are eager to help caregivers who want to introduce their children to the rules, procedures and materials of the Library safely
 - Caregivers are encouraged to work with Library staff to find the best materials, resources, and spaces for their child

As approved by the Board of Library Trustees the 5th day of December, 2022.