



Safe Child Policy

Approved by the Joint Board on Library Trustees 12/11/2025

Purpose:

The Hamilton-Wenham Public Library seeks to create an inviting place to develop a love of books and reading for all Library users. The purpose of this policy is to ensure a safe, welcoming, and appropriate environment for children who visit the Library. The Library values children as important members of the community and strives to provide resources and spaces that encourage learning, exploration, and enrichment. However, the Library is not a substitute for parental or caregiver supervision. This policy establishes guidelines for the presence and behavior of children in the Library to protect their safety and to maintain an atmosphere conducive to study, reading, activities, and use of Library services.

Safety of Children in the Library:

Parents must be aware that the responsibility for the safety and behavior of children using the Library rests at all times with the parent(s) or designated caregiver(s) and not Library staff. The Patron Behavior Policy applies to all patrons including children and teens visiting the Library, and attending programs. Children and teens are expected to follow directions given by Library staff. Children and teens who exhibit inappropriate behavior may be asked to leave the Library.

Parents, legal guardians, or designated caregivers must remain with children aged 10 and under during their Library visit. A designated caregiver must be at least 14 years of age.

Parents should familiarize themselves with Library hours and should not leave children at the Library before opening or within 15 minutes of closing. Children old enough to be alone in the Library should know how to contact a parent or caregiver in case of emergency.

Parents/caregivers should also keep in the mind that the Library may need to close unexpectedly for reasons such as power outages or inclement weather.

The library is a shared space for the whole community. For everyone's comfort and well-being, children who are sick or contagious should not visit the library. Caregivers may be asked to take a child home if illness is apparent.

Children Attending a Library Program:

The library welcomes children of all ages to participate in its programs. To ensure a safe and positive experience for all participants, the following guidelines apply:

- Children under age 8 must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or responsible caregiver (age 14 or older) who remains in the children's room throughout the program. For some programs, the caregiver may be required to stay in the room.
- Children aged 8-10 may attend programs independently; however, a parent or caregiver must remain in the Library and be available in the event of illness, behavior issues, early dismissal, or program cancellation.
- Children must be picked up promptly at the end of the program. If a child is not picked up on time, staff will follow the library's unattended child instructions outlined below.
- Library staff are not responsible for children before or after a scheduled program.
- Library staff do not provide one-on-one supervision or assume responsibility for supervising children beyond facilitating the program.
- Children are expected to behave respectfully toward staff, other participants, and library property. Disruptive behavior may result in dismissal from the program.
- In case of an emergency during a program, staff will take appropriate action, including contacting a parent/caregiver or emergency services if necessary.

Child Left Unattended:

If a child aged 10 or under is left unattended in the Library during operating hours, the Library staff will attempt to contact their parents or caregivers. In the event that the parents or caregivers cannot be contacted within a reasonable amount of time, the Library staff will contact the Hamilton Police Department.

If a child under the age of 14 is alone at closing time and cannot contact their parents or caregivers within 10-minutes of closing, Library staff will contact the Hamilton Police Department. The two most senior staff members will remain with the child until law enforcement officers arrive. Under no circumstance will a Library staff member drive a child home. An incident report will be filled out and submitted to the Director.

Inappropriate Use of Children's and Teen Services:

While patrons of all ages are welcome to browse and check out materials from the Children's and Teen collections, the seating, tables and the use of computers, electronic equipment, and other stand-alone activities within these areas of the Library is exclusively for the use of children, teens, and their families. The Teen area is specifically reserved for youth aged 12-18 and their parents/caregivers. The Children's Room and Teen area are not meeting or workspaces for adults 19 and older.