



# Bartholomew County Public Library

## Child Safety and Protection Policy

Every child (ages 17 and under) has a right to feel safe and secure at all locations and functions of the Bartholomew County Public Library. All library staff and volunteers have the responsibility to ensure that this protection is provided. This policy provides guidelines and a framework of best practices to make the library a safe place for a child to use and enjoy.

### General Library Requirements

Prior to beginning employment, the library will conduct a criminal history check of all employees ages 18 and over. All employees will be subject to a National Sex Offender Registry check. BCPL will repeat criminal history checks and sex offender registry checks at each five-year hire anniversary.

All volunteers that apply to voluntary work at the library will be subject to a National Sex Offender Registry check. Any volunteer with duties that require them to regularly have contact with children will be required to also submit to a criminal history check.

Adults or youth who have been convicted of or are currently under suspicion of either sexual or physical abuse of a minor, or who have a history of inappropriate conduct involving a minor, may not interact with minors in any library sponsored event or activity. This includes performers or persons hired or volunteering to conduct a program or event for the library.

The Children's and Teen areas of the library are reserved for children in their respective age groups, parents/guardians of those children, and adults interested in the materials contained within. Adults who are unaccompanied by children may be questioned by staff, and may be asked to move to another area of the library.

The library fully complies with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) which requires an internet use policy and the filtering of materials that could be harmful to children. While no filter is perfect, the library uses advance filtering software on its wired and wireless network that prohibits access to any sites in violation of federal, state, or local laws and other prohibitions such as profanity, sexually explicit material, expressions of bigotry, racism, and violence, gambling, and information on the manufacture of drugs, weapons, and bombs.

### General Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers when Interacting with Children

- Always treat children with respect and dignity. It is important to listen to what a child is saying and value them as individuals.
- Always use appropriate language with children, and challenge the use of inappropriate language by any young person or adult, while working with children.
- Always ensure that another member of staff/volunteer listens and/or observes, when you are in a difficult or sensitive situation involving a child.
- Avoid being alone with a child. One-to-one meeting with a child should take place openly and in public view or with another staff member present.

- Unless the program is taking place in a public area, at least two staff members or adults should always be present for a library sponsored program or event.
- Comfort a child who is obviously distressed, but always remain in public view.
- Avoid initiating physical contact with any child, except in the event that it is necessary to protect the child or others in the vicinity from harm.
- Never engage in sexually provocative actions or speech or rough physical games.
- Never do things of a personal nature that the child can do for themselves, for example, accompany to the toilet, or assist in adjusting their clothes.
- Always report incidents or concerns related to child safety immediately to the Library Director, or designee, and local law enforcement if appropriate.
- Per Indiana law, all library staff are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. The library takes this responsibility seriously and will contact the Indiana Department of Child Services to report any suspected cases. All staff members are required to receive training from DCS regarding warning signs, definitions, and how to make the reports. Any reports made from staff to DCS should also be reported to his/her supervisor and the Library Director.

#### Unsupervised or Unaccompanied Children

Our library welcomes children of all ages to use our facilities and services. However, the responsibility for the care, safety, and behavior of children using the library rests with the parent, legal guardian, or designated caregiver. The safety of children left alone in a library building is a serious concern of the library staff. The library is a public building, open to all. It is not in the child's best interest to be left unsupervised.

For the safety and comfort of children, a parent, legal guardian, or designated caregiver (at least 16 years of age) must accompany children under the age of 10, while they are using the library. Young children may not be left unattended anywhere in the library, including areas designated for children. The library reserves the right to require children over age 10 to have a parent or guardian present for a particular program or event.

We ask for your cooperation in keeping the library a safe and happy place for all children.

Staff will be guided by this policy in situations such as:

- An unattended child is found frightened or crying in the library
- An unattended child is perceived to be endangering themselves or others
- Another person in the library poses a perceived threat to an unattended child
- After evaluating the situation, staff will make a reasonable attempt to call the caregiver. If no one can be reached, staff will contact local law enforcement officials to assume responsibility for the child. Staff will wait with the child until law enforcement officers arrive.

The parent/guardian is responsible for arranging for transportation home by closing time.

- The child will be given a chance to call home for a ride 10 minutes before the library closes.
- If the parent/guardian cannot be located, two staff members will either allow the child to remain at the library under close supervision or will contact local law enforcement authorities.
- A child left at the library for more than 10 minutes after closing is considered to be an abandoned child, and the police department will be contacted. The police officer will be asked to provide transport to the police department until the police can locate a parent/guardian.
- At least two staff members will remain with and supervise the child.
- A library staff member will not take an unaccompanied child outside of the library building, even at the request of the parent/guardian.

- A library staff member will not transport an unaccompanied child to another location, even at the request of the parent/guardian.

#### Dealing with Unacceptable Behavior

- Remind the child/children or young people concerned that they, like adults, have to behave considerately towards other patrons and staff of the library. Children must abide by the same Patron Code of Conduct as adults do.
- Communicate with children and young persons on an individual basis. Avoid blanket condemnation and eviction of the whole group, wherever possible.
- Deal with challenging and unacceptable behavior calmly and quietly and avoid putting other children, volunteers and staff in any public danger.
- If staff or volunteers witness a child being bullied, or if a child complains of being bullied in the library, volunteers and staff have a duty to do whatever they can to stop it. The aggressive or abusive child should be told that their behavior is not acceptable and made to leave library premises if warranted.
- Depending on the severity and/or repeated nature of the behavior, further actions including temporary suspension for a defined period of time may be warranted

#### General Guidelines for Parents/Guardians

Library staff make every effort to ensure the library is safe and secure, but they cannot monitor the behavior or whereabouts of each child nor can they monitor or control all behavior or whereabouts of people using the library. They cannot assure the safety of an unattended child.

In all situations, the parent/guardian/caregiver who brings a minor child to the library property or program, is responsible for the care and safety of the child. Library staff members cannot assume parental responsibilities for children who are in the library.

Parents are asked to speak with their children about safety among strangers. The library is a public building, and anyone may enter and spend time here. Children should know they can always come to a staff member if another patron is making them feel threatened or uncomfortable.

Parents and guardians play a vital role in their child's library and learning experience. They are encouraged to make the library experience more enjoyable by being aware of their child's reading activities and interests. Staff cannot assume the parental role or take responsibility for what children check out or access on the internet beyond our ordinary policies and procedures. Upon request our professional staff will guide children to materials that are appropriate for their reading level and interest, but will not censor materials. As a library, it is our responsibility to purchase, collect, and display materials that represent and benefit all members of the community, regardless of their age, sex, religion, gender, nationality, identity, and so forth. We understand that there may be materials present in the collection that you feel are inappropriate for your child(ren). It is your responsibility as a parent or guardian to preview materials and, if necessary, limit your child's access to those you deem inappropriate. We are always happy to offer or take suggestions for alternative titles and are happy to help parents and children navigate resources and find materials that fit their worldview and beliefs.

*Adopted by the Library Board of Trustees 04/2021*