

## **Madison County Library System**

### **Safe Child and Vulnerable Person Policy**

**Approved by Board of Trustees May 10, 2022**

The five branches of the Madison County Library System are committed to providing a safe, welcoming environment for everyone, including children and vulnerable persons. The libraries provide materials, programs, and services for all ages. It is our goal for children to use the libraries safely and effectively. In order to achieve this goal, we ask for the parent or caregiver to assist us in providing a positive experience when visiting any of the MCLS branches. Our staff has many duties to perform in order to serve all patrons in the best way possible. For this reason, the staff cannot monitor the whereabouts or behaviors of children or vulnerable persons. Staff cannot assume the responsibility of your children's or vulnerable person's care when they are in the library. No public space, including the library, can guarantee the safety of a child or vulnerable person, especially one left unattended. A child or vulnerable person could be approached by a stranger, become ill, wander outside, or become lost or injured. We are primarily concerned with their safety and our policy helps assure their well-being.

We expect parents/caregivers to be responsible for their child's or vulnerable person's behavior in the library. We expect parents/caregivers to understand and explain the library rules to their children or vulnerable persons. The rules and policies have been developed to safe guard the collection and ensure fairness to all library users.

Definition of a Vulnerable Person: Section 43-47-5 of the Mississippi Code defines "vulnerable person" as follows:

"Vulnerable person" means a person, whether a minor or adult, whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation or improper sexual contact is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical, or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage or the infirmities of aging

#### **Rules and Expectations:**

A parent/caregiver is defined as someone 16 years and older.

Vulnerable persons or persons of any age with special needs affecting decision-making and preschool-aged children (ages 4 and under) should be accompanied by a parent or caregiver at all times. Vulnerable persons and children in this age group should not be left alone while their parent/caregiver uses the public computers, locates materials, attends programs, or utilizes any other library services.

Elementary-aged children (ages 5-10) must be accompanied by a parent/caregiver in the library building at all times. Children in this age group may be left unattended but the parent/caregiver must be easily located within the building.

Young adults (ages 11-17) may use the library on their own. All young adult patrons are subject to the same building rules and policies as all library users.

The library in no way assumes responsibility for any child or vulnerable person left unattended in the building. We expect all children, teens and vulnerable persons to use appropriate language and behavior in the library. Those who do not will be asked to leave.

We expect parents/caregivers to be responsible for the types of materials checked out by their children or vulnerable persons and their selection choices. The library does not limit choices or censor materials.

Parents are fiscally responsible for any damages to library materials, equipment or property incurred by their children.

We expect parents/caregivers to maintain control of their children or vulnerable persons while visiting the library, including times when the parent/caregiver is using a computer.

We expect parents to help children arrive on time for programs and parents who attend children's programs with their children to demonstrate good listening habits.

We expect parents/caregivers to keep sick children or vulnerable persons at home and not bring them to the library, especially during children's programs when illness may easily spread to others.

**Disruptive Behavior:**

As stated in the library "Building Rules & Policies", disruptive behavior in the library is not permitted. If a child or vulnerable person violates these rules, the child/vulnerable person and the parent/caregiver will be informed of the rules by library staff and instructed to comply. If the inappropriate behavior continues, the child/vulnerable person and the parent/caregiver may be asked to leave the library. Failure to adhere to this policy may result in loss of privileges or the requirement that a parent/caregiver supervise a child, regardless of age, at all times during their use of the library.

**Safety Measures:**

If library staff encounter an unattended vulnerable person or preschool age child, they will attempt to locate the parent or caregiver. In the event that the parent/caregiver cannot be located, the police will be contacted and the child or vulnerable person will be placed in their care. Parents or caregivers who fail to adhere to this policy may be subject to loss of privileges.

Vulnerable persons and children of all ages must have transportation at the library's closing. Announcements of closing will be made at all branches at approximately 30, 15, and 5 minutes before the library's closing time. A phone will be provided prior to closing for children to arrange for a ride home. If the parent or caregiver cannot be contacted or if they do not arrive by closing the library staff will call the police and remain with the child/vulnerable person until placed in their care. It will be the parent's or caregiver's responsibility to contact the police department regarding their child or vulnerable person. Parents/caregivers who habitually do not pick up their children or vulnerable person at closing will be in jeopardy of losing library privileges.

Under no circumstances will staff provide transportation for a child of any age or vulnerable person or remain in the building alone with an unattended child or vulnerable person after library closing. When possible, two staff should wait with the child or vulnerable person outside the building.

All children and vulnerable persons should have the telephone number of someone who can assist them in the case of an emergency.

Library staff will report to local authorities or an appropriate social service agency immediately if and when it becomes apparent that a child or vulnerable person is being neglected, abused or exploited.