LS 204 Unattended Children

Section: 200-Public Services
Effective: April 2026

Purpose

Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library (THPL) is dedicated to providing a safe and welcoming environment for customers of all ages. THPL is concerned about the welfare and safety of children when they are left unattended.

Policy

Children aged 12 years and under must not be left alone in the library and must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or a responsible caregiver aged at least 14 years. This age determination was made in consultation with experts in the area of child development.

Children must be supervised by a caregiver who is able to attend to the child's safety and ensure appropriate behavior. If a child in need of supervision is found unattended, library staff will attempt to locate the parent/caregiver in the library and inform him/her of this policy. If no parent/caregiver can be located, or if the child is repeatedly observed to be unattended, law enforcement may be called for assistance. Customers of all ages must adhere to the Library's Code of Conduct. Library Services will work closely with the City of Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office to ensure the safety of unattended children in need of supervision.

Procedure

If an unattended child in need of supervision is in the library during operating hours, and library staff is concerned about the child's welfare or behavior, staff may approach the child. Each case must be evaluated on an individual basis according to the following factors:

- Age of the child
- Length of time the child has been left unattended
- Behavior of the child
- Care and appearance of the child

If the child is unattended, staff will attempt to contact a caregiver. If a caregiver is contacted, this policy will be explained and the staff in-charge shall request that the child be picked up immediately. When the caregiver arrives, the staff member will provide them with a printed copy of this policy along with LS501 Code of Conduct and the Unattended Children Guidelines. If the caregiver is not immediately reached, two staff (one of whom must be an in-charge staff member) must wait to see if the child is picked up by a caregiver. If the caregiver arrives in a reasonable amount of time, the in-charge staff member will explain the policy. The caregiver will also be informed that the authorities will have to be contacted if the child is left unattended again. To document every incident, staff will complete an HCPLC Report as needed.

If the caregiver cannot be reached or has not arrived within 20 minutes after the library's closing time, the appropriate authorities will be contacted: either the City of Tampa Police Department at (813) 231-6130 or the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office at (813) 247-8200. If a caregiver is an older child who does not appear capable of providing care, staff will follow procedures described above.