



whatcom county  
**library system**

## SAFE CHILD AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAM POLICY

### **POLICY NUMBER: 6.03**

**SCOPE:** This policy defines at what age children may at the library unattended and applies to all patrons in every facility of the Whatcom County Library System.

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### **Children are welcome in the library.**

The Whatcom County Library System welcomes children of all ages. Serving children is a vital part of WCLS's mission. We strongly encourage families and children to make full and frequent use of the library. We're happy they're here.

### **Children's safety**

The library is a public place. Anyone may enter and use the facilities. Children left alone in the building can be vulnerable and at risk. It is for the safety of each child that the Whatcom County Library System has adopted this Safe Child Policy.

### **Purpose of this policy**

The purpose of this policy is to inform parents and guardians that WCLS does not assume responsibility for their children as well as to provide guidelines to be used by staff if a child is found unattended in the library.

### **The role of WCLS staff**

WCLS staff cannot and do not assume parental or child care responsibilities for children at the library. Staff cannot monitor the behavior or welfare of every child.

### **Parents' responsibility**

Parents and caregivers are responsible for monitoring their children's safety and supervising their children's behavior in accordance with the Conduct Policy Rules.

### **Children's responsibility**

Children, like all WCLS users, are required to respect WCLS property and to act in a manner appropriate to the use and function of the library. Children are subject to the same Conduct Policy Rules as other patrons and the same consequences, including being asked to leave the library.

### **Levels of supervision required**

1. Children age seven and younger must be supervised by a parent or responsible caregiver age 12 or older at all times while in the library or on library grounds.
2. Children age four and younger must always be in close proximity and within sight of the person responsible for their safety.
3. Children of any age who demonstrate difficulty adhering to the Conduct Policy Rules may be required to have supervision by a parent or responsible caregiver.

### **Children alone at closing**

Parents, guardians, and designated adults are required to be familiar with WCLS's hours and to make advance arrangements to pick up or otherwise transport their children before the library closes. A minor left unattended at closing time may be deemed at risk. Every reasonable effort will be made by the staff to assist the child in contacting an appropriate adult. If no responsible adult is reached, or the child is not picked up within 15 minutes of library closing, WCLS personnel may notify the police to assume custody of the child. Two

staff members will wait with the child until the parent, guardian, other designated adult, or the police pick her/him up. Staff will not transport children home or to any other destination under any circumstances.

### **Special Circumstances**

Children are welcome in the library, and children age eight and older may visit the library on their own, without an accompanying adult. However, if a child of any age is left unattended at the library in circumstances that give WCLS staff cause for concern about the child's safety or welfare, staff may contact the child's family, or child protective or law enforcement authorities, if necessary.

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## **WCLS CHILDREN'S PROGRAM POLICY**

An addendum to the Safe Child Policy

*Adopted by the Whatcom County Rural Library District Board of Trustees June 21, 2005.*

### **Purpose of this addendum**

The Safe Child Policy requires that children age seven and younger must be accompanied in the library by a responsible caregiver 12 or older. The purpose of this addendum is to create a limited exemption from this policy for WCLS after-school children's programs.

### **Children's programming is integral to WCLS's mission.**

WCLS is dedicated to promoting the value and pleasure of reading and libraries, especially to children. By providing regularly scheduled activities for children in branch libraries, WCLS promotes literacy and lifelong learning.

### **As a Rural Library District, WCLS makes special efforts to bring children into the library.**

To help overcome transportation and logistical barriers for school age children in the rural areas we serve, WCLS has arranged for local schools to transport children to our smallest libraries for after-school programs, by bus or on foot, with parental permission. These children are not accompanied by parents or caregivers and their parents are responsible for picking them up or arranging other transportation home.

### **Exemption from the Safe Child Policy**

Children age five to eight attending a WCLS after-school program in a branch library are not required to be accompanied by a caregiver if they present a WCLS permission slip filled out and signed by a parent or guardian.

### **This exemption is for the duration of the program only.**

Outside the hours of the after-school program the child is attending, all provisions of the safe child policy remain in effect. Parents must arrange for children seven and younger to be picked up promptly by a responsible caregiver age 12 or older.

### **WCLS children's programs are not child care**

Parents should be aware that even during children's programs staff cannot take over parental or child care responsibilities for children who come into the library, and cannot guarantee that every child's whereabouts will be monitored at all times. Parents should instruct their children not to leave the program area during the program. Parents should discuss with their children what arrangements they have made for the children to go home after the program and instruct their children not to leave the building except as arranged.

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**RELATED POLICIES:** Conduct Policy 6.01

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**STATUTORY REFERENCE:** RCW 27.12.290 Violators may be excluded.

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ADOPTED by the Whatcom County Library System Board of Trustees January 18, 2005.

**REVISED: September 20, 2016;** June 21, 2005.