

# Safe Child and Vulnerable Person Policy

Adopted on September 22, 2020; Updated on March 27, 2023

## 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

We want SOCPPLS to be a welcoming, safe place for children and vulnerable persons. 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. 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 we believe that 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 safeguard the collection and ensure fairness for all library users.

We require all children under the age of 12 to be accompanied by an adult at all times while visiting the library. Persons of any age with special needs affect decision-making must be accompanied by a parent/caregiver at all times. Children 12 and older may be left unattended provided they understand and follow the rules of the library.

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 set reasonable time limits for their children’s or vulnerable person’s library visits. Parents/caregivers must remain in the library during programs if their child is under 12 years of age.

We expect parents/caregivers to let us know if they, their children, or vulnerable persons are unable to find the type of material they seek. We welcome suggestions for materials that will broaden our collection and improve our services.

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.

We expect parents to see that any fines or fees are promptly paid. 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 – this includes times when parent/caregiver is using a computer. Please remember that the library staff's professional duties do not include babysitting.

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

We expect parents/caregivers of children or vulnerable persons to have a responsible plan for picking up children or vulnerable persons by closing time.

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

### Safety Measures

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

If a child under the age of 12 or vulnerable adult is found unattended while the library is open, library staff will attempt to locate the parent/caregiver in the library. If the parent/caregiver cannot be found, local authorities will be called and the child or vulnerable adult will be placed in their care.

Within 30 minutes of closing time, library staff will conduct a walkthrough both inside and outside of the library building to ensure that children above the age of 12 have transportation home. If necessary, library staff will assist children in calling parents/caregivers.

If a child or vulnerable person has not been picked up by a parent/caregiver by closing time, local officials will be called and staff will remain with the child/vulnerable person until placed in their care.

If a child or vulnerable person is found unattended when the library is open and the child or vulnerable person has become ill or frightened, has become disruptive and will not respond to verbal warnings from library staff, is upset because of weather conditions, long hours out of contact with the parent/caregiver, or other special circumstances, local authorities may be called and the child or vulnerable person may be placed in their care.

After a child or vulnerable person has been placed in the care of local authorities, the staff will leave notes about a child or vulnerable person's whereabouts at the front desk. If after library operating hours a parent/caregiver will need to contact local authorities.

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

Under no circumstances will a staff member give a child or vulnerable person a ride home or remain in the building alone with an unattended child or vulnerable person. When possible, two staff should wait with the child or vulnerable person outside.

Parents/caregivers who disregard library policy regarding this matter may be reported to the appropriate social services agency and may lose all library privileges.

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