

Youth Protection Policy

Morgan County Public Library

Purpose: The Library seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for young people who visit the Library or are involved in Library programs and activities. The Library's goal is to protect youth from incidents of misconduct, abuse, or inappropriate behavior while also protecting staff and volunteers from false accusations.

Definitions: For purposes of this policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

- "Youth" are individuals who are less than 18 years old.
- "Staff" are employees of the Library who have contact with youth in connection with their work duties.
- "Volunteers" are volunteers of the Library who have contact with youth in connection with their volunteer activities.
- "Abuse" is defined by Indiana Code 31-9-2-14.

Selection of Staff and Volunteers: All staff and volunteers are subject to the Library's customary screening requirements, procedures and policies. In particular:

- A criminal background check will be conducted for each staff or volunteer applicant.
- What constitutes an offense that will disqualify a staff or volunteer applicant from working for the Library because of youth protection issues will be determined on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances.
- Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or involving violence or indecency will preclude the applicant from being permitted to work with youth.

Youth Protection Training: All staff and volunteers that have contact with youth at the Library will be trained regarding youth protection issues: The initial orientation or training for staff and volunteers shall at a minimum involve a review of the Library's Youth Protection Policy and Indiana's mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting requirements. The Library will provide additional training to staff and volunteers on an annual basis.

Programs and Facilities: The following policies will be followed:

- Two Adults – to the extent possible and when feasible, at least two unrelated adult staff or volunteers will be in attendance during programs and activities involving youth. If this is not possible or feasible, staff or volunteers will not be alone with youth without the area being open so that the staff or volunteer is observable by others either in person or via video surveillance. All youth after-hours programs must have two adults present.
- When Alone – when one-on-one discussion or counseling is warranted, employee or volunteer interaction with a youth will take place in an area that allows for private conversation while remaining observable by others.
- Open Door – to the extent possible and when feasible, doors to rooms where programs and activities involving youth are conducted should be open during the program or activity unless there is a window in the door or a window to the room.

- No Locked Doors – Doors to rooms where programs and activities involving youth are conducted must never be locked during the program or activity.

Youth on Library Premises: The Library encourages and welcomes youth of all ages to use its facilities and services and to participate in its programs and activities. However, responsibility for the safety and behavior of youth while at the Library rests solely with the parent, guardian or authorized caregiver and not with Library staff or volunteers. The following policies apply with respect to youth on Library premises:

- Library staff and volunteers are not responsible for monitoring or supervising the safety and behavior of youth on Library premises.
- The parent or guardian of youth on Library premises is solely responsible for ensuring the youth is appropriately supervised and for the safety and behavior of the youth.
- Youth under the age of 6 must be within eyesight of an adult caregiver at all times.
- Youth ages 6-10 may not be left in the building without the supervision of an adult or older sibling unless participating in a specified library program. Supervision means that an adult or older sibling, physically in the building, knows where the youth is and the youth knows where the caregiver is and how to reach them
- If a youth's behavior becomes disruptive to the operations of the Library, to other patrons or to Library staff, appropriate action in accordance with the Library's policies and practices will be taken.

Interaction with Youth: The following policies apply with respect to interaction with youth by staff and volunteers:

- Staff and volunteers shall not accept or assume the responsibility for monitoring or supervising the safety and behavior of youth on Library premises.
- Staff and volunteers shall not contact or communicate with youth outside of the operations, programs and activities of the Library unless they have a prior, independent relationship with the youth.
- Staff and volunteers shall not in the presence or hearing of a youth use profanities, vulgarities or emotionally abusive language.
- The Library acknowledges that appropriate physical contact is important in the emotional development of all youth in our care. Examples of appropriate physical touch include high fives, fist bumps and pats on the back or shoulder. Hugs that are initiated by youth may be returned by staff or volunteers. Staff and volunteers may touch or position a youth's hands to demonstrate proper use of a tool or object. Staff and volunteers should not pick up children (to reduce potential for both abuse allegations and physical injury) and should not allow children to sit on their laps.
- Staff and volunteers shall never assist any youth with restroom usage. Any youth too young or otherwise unable to provide for themselves regarding restroom usage should have a parent, guardian or authorized caregiver present to assist the youth.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: Indiana law (IC 31-33-5-1) requires that any individual who has reason to believe that a youth is a victim of abuse or neglect must immediately report such directly to

the Indiana Department of Child Services (“DCS”) or to a local law enforcement agency. This mandatory reporting requirement includes reporting child abuse, including any sex offense against a youth, whether committed by any Library staff or volunteers while on Library premises or by any person off Library premises.

The following reporting procedures apply if staff or volunteer has reason to believe that an act of child abuse or neglect has occurred on Library premises by any person, including any Library employee or volunteer:

- The Library staff or volunteer shall themselves immediately report the occurrence directly to DCS or local law enforcement.
- The Library staff or volunteer shall immediately report the occurrence to the Library Director.
- The Library Director shall immediately report the occurrence to DCS or local law enforcement.
- If the alleged child abuse or neglect involves allegations against a Library employee or volunteer, the Library employee or volunteer shall be immediately suspended from employment and/or volunteer activities pending the investigation of the allegations.
- The Library Director shall immediately notify the Library’s liability insurance provider and the Library’s Board of Trustees.
- All Library employees and volunteers shall cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities.
- If the alleged child abuse or neglect involves allegations against a Library employee or volunteer, the Library Director will investigate the circumstances of the alleged child abuse or neglect.

Any Library staff or volunteer who is not determined to be innocent of the alleged child abuse or neglect shall be subject to permanent removal from any contact with youth in connection with their work duties or volunteer activities as well as additional ameliorative and disciplinary action up to and including termination as an employee or volunteer as appropriate.