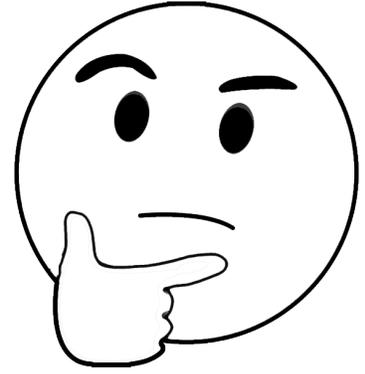


# Use of the Library After School

## *What Parents Need to Know*



Since the new library building opened in 2016, the Thomas Memorial Library has seen increased use by children who come to the library directly from school. We welcome this use of the library, and love to see the building being a vibrant, busy place after school. Library staff work hard to select resources and create programs to ignite kids' curiosity and engage their imaginations.

As you prepare for the coming school year, here are some things parents should know about use of the library by unattended children after school.

### ***Who Is Responsible for My Child?***

Our programs and the library building are supervised by library staff, but children who come to the library are free to use most areas of the building, and are also free to come and go from the building. We often encounter children who attend a program for a short time, leave the room--or even the building--and return a while later. Library staff do not take attendance or keep track of where children go unless they are violating a library policy, such as engaging in behavior that is disturbing to others.

It is most important that parents understand that, unlike school employees, the library staff does not act "in loco parentis" (in place of the parent.) Library policy states: "The responsibility for the safety and behavior of children visiting the library rests with the parent, guardian, or assigned chaperone, not with the library staff." When you send your child to the library for a library program, it is up to you to ensure they attend. We have no way of making sure your child follows your wishes. We also cannot enforce parental rules about screen time or other activities. Not only is this not our role or our mission, it is also not practical.

We have noticed that children leaving the library building often do so without exercising proper caution in the parking lot, both on foot and on bicycles. When we witness it, we make clear to them that cars are coming and going from the lot and they need to be more cautious. However, library staff does not routinely supervise the outside of the library building. The intersection between the library and Cumberland Farms is a dangerous one for kids to be crossing on their own. Moreover, like the library, the gas station is a public place and there is no one monitoring who your child interacts with at that location, or any other location in town. Again, library staff cannot keep track of who is in the library, when they leave, or where they go.

### ***Who Else Is In the Library After School?***

Because the library is a public space, everyone is welcome--not just your children, but everyone regardless of age or background. Permitting your child to come to the library after school unattended is akin to dropping them off at the mall. The Thomas Memorial Library is a public place serving all ages and all walks of life. We cannot keep track of who is in the building at any given time. Anyone is free to enter or leave during the library's business hours. We urge parents to become aware of what their children are doing when they are at the library unattended and where they are going.

## ***How Does My Child Behave When I'm Not Around?***

Most children who use the library after school behave responsibly and respectfully. We have observed that for many children, coming to the library alone after school is a first taste of freedom, which for some, leads to some behavior parents might not expect or approve of. For example:

- Some children leave the library to go to Cumberland Farms, CVS, or other local businesses to buy snacks and drinks, which they then bring back to the library.
- Some children play on their phones or other devices for extended periods of time.
- Some children watch online videos or play games on the library computers for extended periods of time.
- Some younger children sometimes use foul language as a means of “showing off” to older kids.
- Some children, with too much time on their hands, find ways to entertain themselves, like playing in the library bathrooms, hiding around corners and behind furniture, stealing each other’s property, and other behaviors that have little to do with the functions of a public library.

At times we have also contended with children disrespecting library property and engaging in unsafe behavior by jumping off walls, climbing fences, wrestling on furniture, throwing library toys at each other, and running up and down the stairs. We do not feel that children who engage in these behaviors are doing so out of malice or recklessness. Rather, many of the children who have stayed at the library unattended for hours at a time are simply developmentally unable to supervise themselves, or exercise the kind of judgment necessary to keep themselves safe and interact respectfully with others while on their own.

## ***Is My Child Capable of Being on His or Her Own Unsupervised?***

This is a question you, as parents, in discussion with your children, will need to answer. While we try to accommodate children after school by offering programs and resources to engage them, it is most important that parents understand that the library does not provide an aftercare service. We would love to have your children here engaging with library resources and participating in library programs, but if your child is not capable of self-supervision yet, we ask that you or a responsible caregiver accompany them to our programs. If you do choose to allow your child to come to the library unsupervised, we ask that you please inform your children about your expectations for their behavior while they are at the library on their own. If you determine that your children are not yet developmentally able to be left alone without supervision, we ask that you please explore suitable after school care options for them, and bring them to library programs when they can be supervised.



***Thank you! We look forward to providing your children with the best library materials and experiences we can offer!***

