

Patron Behavior Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

The Atlantic Public Library is designed to be a safe and comfortable place for all members of the public to use. Patrons are expected to observe the rights of other patrons and staff members and to use the library for its intended purposes.

REGULATIONS

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior is generally defined as “any patron behavior that interferes with the normal operation of the library or which interferes with another patron’s ability to use the library.” Disruptive behavior includes but is not limited to:

- Any behavior that endangers the safety or health of others.
- Violation of any local, state, or federal law.
 - Smoking on library property (visit SmokeFreeIowa online for the full law).
 - Vandalism or deliberate destruction of library materials.
 - Theft of library materials or the personal property of other patrons and staff.
 - Accessing internet sites that are prohibited by law.
 - Consumption or possession of alcoholic beverages, or use or possession of controlled substances on library grounds, or being under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances.
- Taking library materials into the lobby or restrooms if they have not been checked out.
- Deliberate disruption of library procedures.
- Refusal to follow reasonable direction from Library staff, such as leaving the Library during normal closing procedures or following a suspension of Library privileges or refusing to evacuate during an emergency.
- Sleeping.
- Abusive, foul, or obscene language or gestures.
- Verbally or physically threatening or harassing other patrons, volunteers, and/or staff, such as stalking, staring, lurking, offensive touching, and obscene acts such as sex acts or indecent exposure.
- Rough housing, rowdiness, running in the library, fighting, or wrestling.
- Solicitation of any kind or panhandling on library property.
- Campaigning, petitioning, interviewing, or surveying patrons or staff in a manner that is disruptive to library activities.
- Monopolizing library resources or staff time.
- Use of the library telephone for personal business longer than five minutes.
- Loud talking, laughing, or using audio equipment or cell phones that disturbs or could disturb other patrons.
- Use of skateboards, roller blades, skate shoes, or scooters inside the library.
- Inappropriate dress, such as bare feet, no shirt, roller blades, bathing suits, etc.
- Loitering or excessive aimless/restless roaming. Loitering after closing.
- Deliberate use of library facilities for unintended purposes, such as bathing or sexual activity.
- Eating or drinking in the library except for bottles and cups with secured lids. Food is not allowed, unless provided during a library-sanctioned event, or in the meeting rooms.
- Carrying a weapon in the library or on library property (unless authorized by law).
- Poor hygiene that constitutes a nuisance.
- Pets or animals, unless they are part of a sponsored exhibit or program; or if allowed as a medical assist under ADA guidelines.
- Trespassing in nonpublic areas.
- Other kinds of behavior deemed inappropriate in the opinion of the Director or designated staff members.

UNATTENDED CHILDREN

The Library Board and staff are concerned for the safety and welfare of children who use the library unattended by a parent or guardian. Children of any age should not be left at the library for an extended period of time. Parents are responsible for the behavior of their children while they are in the library and/or on library property.

- Children age 6 and younger must be accompanied and directly supervised at all times by a parent, guardian, or responsible caregiver. Exceptions are during library programs or events.
- Children in grades 1-2 may use the library without direct supervision, as long as a parent, guardian, or responsible caregiver is in the building.
- Students in grades 3 and up are allowed to use the library without parental or caregiver supervision.
- Children 12 and under are not considered responsible caregivers.
- Parents must provide a means of transportation home when the library closes for children ages 17 and under. Children cannot remain at the library after closing, except during an authorized program or event. Transportation must then be arranged for the end of the library program or event.
 - If there is no transportation available at closing time or the end of an after-hours program, the police will be contacted.

ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement of these violations may take the form of any of the following, depending on the severity of the misconduct, which will be determined by the staff on duty. The library may implement any of these consequences at any time, including an immediate ban from the library premises. Library staff reserve the right to ask a patron to leave the library for any reason.

The library uses security cameras as an aid to enforcement. Information obtained through video monitoring will be used exclusively for security and law enforcement purposes. The library director or his/her designee may authorize the review or release of still photos or video clips for legitimate purposes including the protection of library patrons, staff, and property and/or to protect the city from lawsuits.

Warning

Unless the behavior is of a criminal nature or poses a threat to others, patrons acting inappropriately will be given two (2) warnings. If their behavior continues, they will be asked to leave the library.

Banned

Patrons exhibiting extreme unacceptable behavior will be banned from the library. A patron can be banned immediately, without a warning, if the situation warrants. Depending upon the situation, the library has the option to ban the patron on a permanent or temporary basis. A banned patron may petition the Library Director or the Library Board to be reinstated 6 months following the ban.

Calling the Police

Staff can call the police at any time. In cases where a patron poses a clear danger to self or others, or where he/she deliberately violates the law, or where he/she refuses to leave the library after being required to do so, staff should call the police department for assistance.

PROCEDURES

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Staff should be aware of what is happening in the library at all times. While the staff cannot be everywhere and see everything, staff should react quickly to patron behavior. To do this, staff should:

- Be aware of patrons in the building. Staff should be doing regular rounds on the floor they are assigned, as well as the lobby area.
- Staff can approach patrons who appear to need assistance or may become disruptive and ask if they need help finding something.
- Be visible to patrons. Many times disruptive behavior is deterred by a staff member being visible.

In response to an animal in the building, ADA guidance allows the following two questions:

1. Is the animal a service animal required because of a disability?
 - a. If the answer is yes, proceed to the next question. The person does not need to identify what the disability is.
 - b. If the answer is no, ask the person to come back at a later time without the animal.
2. What work or task is the animal trained to perform?
 - a. These categories are allowed: medical alert, mobility assist, autism support, seeing eye, and psychiatric. The person may be more specific than these exact categories such as responding with seizure alert rather than medical alert.
 - b. Emotional support or therapy animals are not allowed in the library as they are not covered in the ADA guidelines for public spaces.

Dealing with disruptive behavior:

1. Remain friendly and calm in addressing the patron situation. Identify yourself as a library employee.
2. Do not touch the patron.
3. Discuss the issue with the patron away from other patrons in the library if possible.
4. The staff member can give a copy of the library's written policy to the patron if needed.
5. If the patron refuses to leave the library after being asked to so, or becomes abusive or aggressive, the staff member should call the police department and ask the patron to be escorted from the library premises.
6. Any incident of policy violation must be documented.
 - a. Fill out an incident report form. Fill in the information to the best of your ability:
 - i. Date & time of incident
 - ii. Name of the patron
 - iii. Witnesses
 - iv. What happened
 - v. What you did to resolve the issue
 - b. Turn the incident report in to the Library Director.
 - c. The Library Director will review the incident and note it in the Incident Log, which is available on the Staff shared drive.

UNATTENDED CHILDREN

- If a child 6 years and younger is without parental or caregiver supervision:
 - Library staff will first try to locate the parents or caregiver in the building by using the paging system.
 - If the parents or caregivers do not respond to the page within 10 minutes, library staff will contact the police department and stay with the child until the police arrive.

- Approximately 30 minutes before closing, library staff will investigate if there are any patrons under the age of 18 in the building without a ride home. If so, the minor should make every effort to contact the parent/guardian.
 - Staff shall wait 10 minutes after closing time for parents/guardians to pick up their child. After 10 minutes, the police will be contacted. Staff will remain with the child until the police arrive.
 - Staff shall fill out an incident report on their next working day, describing the situation.
 - The Parental Notification Letter will be sent to the parent or guardian. See Appendix A.
- Staff should not, under any circumstances, take the child out of the building or take the child home.

ENFORCEMENT

The safety of the patrons and the staff is paramount. If the staff feels unsafe in approaching a patron about disruptive behavior, the staff member can ask for assistance from another staff member, or call the police for help.

Warning – A patron may receive up to 2 warnings for their disruptive behavior. If the behavior is not curbed after the first warning, a second one may be issued. A second warning does not have to be issued. If a first warning was ignored or did not curb patron’s behavior, the staff member can immediately proceed to the next step – asking the patron to leave.

- Warnings should include the consequences of not changing behavior.
- Any warnings issued to a patron then needs to be communicated to the other staff currently working.
- Children should, in most cases, receive 2 warnings. The second warning should include the consequences of being asked to leave for the rest of the day or week, if necessary.
- Staff need to keep an eye on patrons who have received a warning to make sure the behavior is not repeated.
- A warning is not necessary for *each kind* of disruptive behavior. For example, a staff person warns someone about being loud. Then the same patron is warned for running in the library. That is the second warning and any other disruptive behavior should result in the patron being asked to leave.

Banned – A patron may be banned from the library for any length of time, due to their behavior in the library. The length of a ban may be determined by the Library Director. Staff can ban a patron immediately if the disruptive behavior is severe enough.

- Theft or vandalism should be met with an immediate banning from the library. The police should be called immediately upon discovering the patron’s conduct. The patron will be banned for a least 1 year and can only appeal this decision by writing the Library Director or the Library Board.
- After receiving two (2) warnings, a patron should be banned from the library. In these instances, the banning should be shorter, either for the day, the week, or the month.
 - This is up to staff discretion and based upon the behavior of the patron.
- Any illegal behavior, including harassing or threatening violence upon a patron or a staff member. These behaviors shall be taken seriously and the staff should call the police immediately. Patrons will be banned for at least 1 year and can only appeal this decision by writing the Library Director.
- Any other instance the staff feel is warranted to ban a patron.

- Staff should call the police at any time they feel uncomfortable, uneasy, or feel there may be an issue with addressing a patron’s behavior.
- Any time a patron is banned from the library, an incident report should be filled out and turned in to the Library Director.

Calling the Police – Staff should never hesitate in calling the police if they feel their safety or the safety of the patrons is at risk. Staff should feel comfortable calling 911 or the non-emergency number.

- When calling, make sure to identify yourself and where you are calling from.
- Explain to the dispatcher the situation happening in the library.
 - Start by saying “We need an officer in the library immediately”.
 - Be clear as to what the issue is. The dispatcher does not need the background to the story. For example, “I have a patron who is threatening to hurt someone.” If the dispatcher needs more details, they will ask.
 - Make sure to include names, if you know them, and descriptions of the patrons.
 - If the patron leaves before the police arrive, try to find out which direction they have gone. Don’t follow them, but try to see from a window or from the lobby.
- Make sure to notify all working staff of the situation as soon as possible. Do not use the paging system.
- An incident report should be filled out every time the police are contacted.

GUIDELINES

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

- Staff should be consistent in their treatment of patrons. No patron shall receive special treatment for disruptive behavior.
- If an animal does not meet requirements of a service animal, the person and animal must leave immediately. Staff can offer to help at a later time or bring what the person needs to them outside the building. A service animal ID card, doctor’s note, or wearing a service vest does not replace having to answer the allowed questions.
- Staff should take all complaints concerning other patron’s behavior seriously. Depending on the situation, staff should approach the patron to discuss the situation if they did not observe the behavior themselves.
 - There are exceptions to this, such as harassment, sexual harassment, threats, or violence.
- A staff person who observes or receives a report where a patron’s actions present an imminent danger to the life or safety of him/herself or others, should call the police or 911 immediately.

UNATTENDED CHILDREN

- Staff should be consistent in their treatment of patrons regardless of the age of the patron. No child shall receive special treatment for behavior or for being without a responsible caregiver, parent, or legal guardian.
- Children under the age of 12 are not responsible caregivers for younger siblings.

ENFORCEMENT

- Staff are authorized to handle disciplinary issues on a case-by-case basis.
- Staff can request assistance from co-workers or from the Library Director. However, the staff member who has received notice of behavior or has observed disruptive behavior will still need to be present.
- All warnings and bans must be communicated to all working staff members.
- Staff have access to the Incident Report log and should review it on a weekly basis.
- If members of the public who have been banned from the library are found on library property, staff shall call the police to report trespassing.

BOARD APPROVED: JANUARY 2016

REVISED/REVIEWED: JANUARY 2026

Appendix A

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION LETTER

Date: _____

Dear _____ ,

The Atlantic Public Library has recently experienced an incident involving your child, _____ , where he/she was on library grounds without adequate supervision. A copy of the library's Patron Behavior Policy is enclosed for your attention. We ask you review the policy and make every effort to follow it.

In the event your child is left at the library after closing, the police will be notified and will take custody of your child. We have also enclosed the library's hours of operation.

We do not wish to suspend library privileges for you or your family, but the safety of children as well as the proper operation of the library is our first responsibility. If you have any questions regarding this policy or its enforcement, please contact the Library Director.

Michelle Andersen
Library Director