

S P O K A N E C O U N T Y L I B R A R Y D I S T R I C T

Policy Title	Child and Vulnerable Adult Safety		
Previous Title	Children’s Safety in Libraries		
Approval Date	December 19, 1991	Revision Date	April 1, 2026
Related Policies	Access to Library Services Code of Conduct Collection Development Computer, Wireless Network and Internet Use Customer Privileges and Responsibilities Intellectual Freedom		
Statutory Reference	RCW 74.34.020 (21)		
Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, establish clear standards of conduct, and provide guidance for prevention, reporting, and response. This policy reflects the Spokane County Library District’s commitment to maintaining a safe environment, complying with legal obligations, and preserving the integrity of the Spokane County Library District.		

In the event of the amendment of any law, regulation, or ordinance incorporated into this policy or upon which this policy relies, the policy shall be deemed amended in conformance with those changes.

In cases where this policy conflicts with any local ordinance, state or federal law, the terms of that law, and its underlying rules or regulations shall prevail. In all other cases, Spokane County Library District policies and practices prevail.

The Board reserves the right to change and/or modify this policy at any time, as circumstances dictate and in accordance with applicable law.

Policy

The Spokane County Library District strives to create places, programs, and services that encourage children and adults to explore, learn, and create. District facilities are public places that serve a wide variety of people and their information needs.

The District distinguishes between Regular Library Services and Special Programs, as defined below.

Section 1: Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions are used:

Abuse: Abuse exists when there is endangerment of a Special Program Participant’s physical or mental health due to injury by act or omission. Abuse includes the following:

- a) “Physical Abuse” includes physical injury inflicted on a Special Program Participant by other than accidental means. Physical injury includes, but is not limited to, lacerations, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, severe or frequent bruising, or great bodily harm. Conduct qualifying as Physical Abuse may include, but is not limited to, hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraint, pushing, or other forceful physical contact.

- b) “Verbal Abuse” includes language that is degrading or threatening, and includes verbal interactions such as name calling, insults, cursing, derogatory remarks, belittling, and shaming.
- c) “Sexual Abuse” includes a wide spectrum of interactions with Special Program Participants including rape, sexual battery, physical sexual contact, sexually explicit or offensive verbal communication, verbal sexual harassment, voyeurism, sexually oriented conversations, sexual intercourse or sexual touching of a Special Program Participant, sexual exploitation, exposing of genitalia, viewing of sexual activity, or permitting, allowing or encouraging a Special Program Participant to engage in prostitution.
- d) “Emotional Abuse” includes conduct that reasonably causes harm to a Special Program Participant’s psychological or intellectual functioning, which is exhibited by emotional damage such as severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggression. Emotional damage may be demonstrated by substantial and observable changes in behavior, emotional response, or learning, which are incompatible with the Special Program Participant’s age or stage of development. Emotional Abuse includes the following conduct: shaming, humiliating, and cruelty.

Caregiver: An individual who is responsible for the care of a vulnerable adult

Child: Any individual under the age of eighteen years.

Customer: A member of the public using Regular Library Services.

Facility or Facilities: All buildings, properties, and vehicles owned and/or managed by the District.

Parents: The legal guardian(s) of any minor child, and/or any adult standing in loco parentis.

Inappropriate behaviors: Any behavior that does not comply with this policy and/or its related procedures including actions that breach District standards, create risk, or undermine a safe and respectful environment.

In loco parentis: An individual stands in loco parentis when the individual acts in place of a parent and/or assumes the responsibilities of a parent.

Regular Library Services: Normal and regular use of library facilities and resources by library customers. Regular Library Services are typically open to the general public and transactional in nature.

Resources: Library materials, equipment, services, programs, and events provided by the District.

Special Programs: Participation by a child in a District-sponsored program, event, or activity that requires a legal guardian to sign a permission slip in order for the child to participate.

Special Program Participant: A child who is registered to participate in a Special Library Program and whose legal guardian has signed a permission slip in order for that child to participate.

Vulnerable Adult: Someone age 18 or older who, due to physical or mental impairment, disability, advanced age, or illness, cannot adequately care for themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation (RCW 74.34.020 (21))

Section 2: Regular Library Services Use

The District monitors the use of library facilities and/or library resources by customers for potential Code of Conduct violations and will respond to those situations in accordance with the District's Code of Conduct Policy.

Children's Safety at District Facilities

The District recognizes that it is the responsibility of parents to monitor and guide their children's use of District facilities. The District respects the privacy of the customers who use its facilities.

No employee, officer, or agent of the District stands in loco parentis.

Parents are responsible for ensuring their children are cared for, safe, and feel secure when visiting a District facility or attending a District event. District facilities, programs and employees do not act as childcare or as replacements for parents, guardians, or caregivers.

District employees will take appropriate action if a child visiting a District facility or attending a District event appears to be "at-risk." Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Children who appear to be under the age of six (6) left alone at a District facility.
- Children of any age who become disruptive or appear to be distressed when left alone or in the care of other children at a District facility.
- Children who appear to be subjected to physical or emotional abuse while using District facilities.
- Children who appear to be subjected to uninvited interactions.
- Children left alone at closing time who appear to be under the age of 12 or appear distressed.

If a situation such as one of the above occurs, District employees shall follow established District procedures, which may include notification of a parent, law enforcement, and/or child protective services agency.

Children's Use of District Resources

The District recognizes that it is the responsibility of parents to monitor and guide their children's use of District resources, reading and viewing of library materials, and use of District computers and network resources to access the Internet. The District respects the privacy of the customers who use its facilities. No employee, officer, or agent of the District stands in loco parentis.

A child's use of library materials is addressed in the District's Collection Development Policy.

A child's use of District-provided computers and internet access is addressed in the District's Computer, Wireless Network and Internet Use Policy.

Vulnerable Adult Safety at District Facilities

The District does not place any conditions and/or monitor the use of District facilities and resources by vulnerable adults. The District respects the privacy of the customers who use its facilities.

No employee, officer, or agent of the District stands in the place of a caregiver for a vulnerable adult.

Section 3: Special Programs Abuse Prevention Plan

This Special Programs Abuse Prevention Plan only applies to Special Programs and Special Program Participants as defined above.

Zero Tolerance Statement

The District has zero tolerance for abuse and will not tolerate the abuse of Special Program Participants in its services and programs. Any abuse by an employee or volunteer will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service. Further, the District will fully cooperate with law enforcement and child protective services throughout the investigation and resolution of abuse incidents.

One-on-One Interactions

One-on-one interactions between a District employee or volunteer and Special Program Participants are not permitted under any circumstances.

Minimum Required Staffing for Special Programs

When working with minor children who are participating in District-sponsored Special Programs, employees shall conduct activities with two or more District employees and/or volunteers in the room or space at all times.

If that requirement cannot be met, activities shall be moved to a public area. If activities cannot be moved to a public area, the Special Program activity shall be canceled.

Personal Interactions – Outside Work

The District strongly encourages employees and volunteers to refrain from outside contact with Special Program Participants with which they do not have a pre-existing familial or social relationship (i.e., children are friends at school, families attend same religious institution, etc.). However, if there is a pre-existing social or familial relationship, District guidelines must be followed by an employee or volunteer while performing District directed duties.

Monitoring and Supervising Interactions between Special Program Participants

Employees and volunteers must monitor and supervise interactions between Special Program Participants to prevent inappropriate behaviors and/or abuse. When supervising Special Program Participants, employees, and volunteers shall model appropriate behavior, and Special Program Participants shall not determine what is and is not acceptable behavior.

Employees and volunteers shall ensure:

1. Special Program Participant interactions are age and developmentally appropriate.
2. Special Program Participants respect each other's physical boundaries.
3. Special Program Participants are not bullying, teasing, dominating, or displaying sexualized behaviors toward others.
4. Special Program Participants solve problems without fighting.
5. Special Program Participants are not engaging in one-on-one interactions together that aren't observable or interruptible.
6. Minimum required staffing for special programs, as defined above, is maintained.

Physical and Verbal Interactions

The District promotes a positive, respectful environment while protecting Special Program Participants, employees, and volunteers. The District prohibits inappropriate physical and/or verbal interactions. Any inappropriate physical and/or verbal interactions by employees or volunteers towards Special Program Participants will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Reporting Inappropriate Behaviors

If employees or volunteers have reasonable suspicion of inappropriate behaviors by other employees or volunteers, or Special Program Participants, it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations in accordance with the District's reporting procedures. Failure to report inappropriate behaviors by employees or volunteers involving Special Program Participants will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Third Parties Services and Facility Use

The District may contract with a third-party (e.g., external organizations or individuals) to provide services as part of a District's Special Program activity. Third party individuals are not considered when meeting minimum staffing requirements, as defined above.

Section 4: Acknowledgement of Policies, Procedures, and Standards

All employees and volunteers shall confirm that they have read and agree to comply with the District's Child and Vulnerable Adult Safety policies, procedures, and standards by signing a written acknowledgment upon hire and annually thereafter.

The District will make a good faith effort to implement this policy in a fair and consistent manner.

The Executive Director will establish administrative procedures necessary to implement this policy.