

8. **To recommend to the Ventura Board of Supervisors that they approve a revision**
to the Library Rules of Behavior regarding the supervision of minors.

Report/Action

To: Ventura County Library Commission
From: Lori Karns, Youth Services manager

The Library Director has asked me to present this for your approval in order to revise the current Ventura County Library Behavior Policy (attached).

The Ventura County Library would like to require that children, under the age of 9, be accompanied by a parent or responsible caregiver that is 12 years of age or older. The current policy only requires that preschool aged children and younger must have a parent with them at all times (see underlined section in the attached policy). The recommended revision has been inserted and italicized.

There have been a growing number of young children who come into the libraries without a parent or responsible caregiver. There is an assumption that the public library is a "safe" place, with staff who will watch over the children, thus relieving the parents of having to pay for child care.

When children misbehave and have been warned, they can be asked to leave the library even after dark. The staff, out of concern for their safety, may ask them for a contact phone number for their parent, the name or phone number of a neighbor, or even the cell phone for an older sibling. Some younger children can't provide that information accurately. Likewise, if they are injured or upset and in tears, we need to have caregivers take over. Smaller children may be too trusting of strangers.

Why these ages?

The Youth Services staff discussed the stages of child development and decided that a 9 year old would be more likely to act independently, be more wary of strangers, and could be asked to leave the library if misbehaving - without having to contact the parent or caregiver to pick him or her up.

The age of the responsible caregiver was set at 12 after some research. The State of California does not have a statute to cover an age at which a minor can be a babysitter. The Department of Social Services looks at 12 year olds as able to be in charge of younger children overnight, providing other safety and nutritional resources are available.

This recommendation to revise this policy was approved unanimously by both the Youth Services committee and the Library Supervisors' Forum. These two groups have members from each library branch in the Ventura County Library system.

Thank you.
Lori Karns
Principal Librarian
West Region and Youth Services

Library Commission Meeting
4/15/10
Agenda Item 8