

Patron Behavior Policy

I. Purpose

It is the mission of the Hoston Free Public Library (the “Library”) to enrich people’s lives by providing easy access to the world of information and culture for all ages, backgrounds, and abilities in a safe and welcoming environment. The Library Board of Trustees has adopted this Patron Behavior Policy to ensure that patrons have fair and equitable opportunity to the use and enjoyment of all Library services, materials and facilities without being subject to unnecessary interference or disturbance by others.

Library users are asked to respect and follow the rules of conduct listed below. These rules shall apply to the Library building and its surrounding grounds, and to all persons entering in or on the premises, unless otherwise specified.

II. Rules for a Safe Environment

1. Illegal Behavior

Illegal behavior is strictly prohibited. Any staff member who witnesses illegal behavior will notify the director who will contact the police when necessary. Illegal behavior includes, but is not limited, the following:

- ***Violations of Law.*** Committing, or attempting to commit, any activity in violation of federal, state, or local law, ordinance or regulation.
- ***Drunk and/or disorderly conduct.*** Persons noticeably under the influence of any controlled substance or alcoholic or intoxicating liquor. Persons fighting, making unreasonable noise, exhibiting threatening behavior, using abusive or obscene language, or engaging in hazardous or physically offensive behavior.
- ***Controlled substances.*** Using, selling, or possessing controlled substances or drug paraphernalia on library property, and entering the Library while intoxicated or under the influence of illegal controlled substances. The use of alcohol is prohibited on Library property.
- ***Criminal mischief.*** Inflicting intentional damage to the property of another, including vandalism.
- ***Theft.*** Wrongfully taking, obtaining, or withholding the property of another person. Theft of library materials, using false identification to obtain a library card, or using another person’s library card without their permission is against state law and may be prosecuted under MGL, Ch. 266, Sec. 99A.

- ***Damaging or defacing library materials.*** Those who damage or deface library materials or property may be prosecuted (MGL, Ch. 266, Sec 100). Parents can be held liable for damage done by a child under the age of 18 (MGL, Ch. 231, Sec. 85G).
- ***Assault.*** Any intentional or reckless behavior that causes injury to another.
- ***Harassment.*** Behavior that threatens or annoys another person, including staring, photographing, video or audio recording, following, stalking, harassing, arguing with, threatening, using obscene gestures or language (including those which convey a sexual message), and offensive touching.
- ***Public Lewdness.*** Intentionally exposing the private parts of the body in a lewd manner in a public place.
- ***Trespassing.*** Knowingly entering or remaining unlawfully on Library property

2. Patron Safety on Library Property

- Shirts and shoes are required and must always be worn inside the Library and on Library property.
- The use of skateboards, roller blades, or other wheeled forms of recreational equipment are not allowed on Library property, which includes but is not limited to sidewalks and parking areas, or within the Library building.
- Library patrons must park bicycles or other vehicles only in authorized areas.
- Animals are not permitted in the library other than service animals, those used in law enforcement, or for Library programming.
- All doors, aisles, entrances, and exits must remain obstacle-free. This includes, and is not limited to, loitering in doorways and running power cords across areas that are used for walking.
- Smoking, vaping, and chewing tobacco use is prohibited on Library property.
- The use of incendiary devices such as candles, matches, and lighters is prohibited on Library property.
- Patrons shall not be permitted in Library offices, lounges, storage areas, or other non-public areas while unaccompanied by a staff member without prior agreement with the Library Director.

- Patrons shall not disregard the direction of a Library staff member. This includes, but is not limited to, remaining in the library beyond regular operating hours or when circumstances dictate evacuation (such as in the case of a fire, power outage, inclement weather, or similar situation).
- School and community groups using the library must seek prior approval from the Library Director and have a teacher or other appropriate staff present to ensure that Library usage is in conformance with these rules.

III. Rules for Personal Behavior

1. Unauthorized Use

- Patrons must leave the library promptly at closing time and are not permitted to be in the library when it is not open to the public without prior permission from the Library Director. Further, any patron whose privileges to use the library have been denied may not enter the library.

2. Proper Use of the Library

- Patrons shall be engaged in activities associated with the use of the library while in the building or on Library property. Patrons that are not engaged in reading, studying, writing, using library materials or resources, or participating in scheduled Library programs shall be required to leave the building.

3. Personal Property

Personal property brought into the Library is subject to the following:

- The Library is not responsible for items left unattended.
- Library personnel may restrict the number and size of parcels carried into the library. The Library prohibits large items such as suitcases, large garbage bags, and duffle bags unless medically required.
- The Library provides no accommodations for the storage of personal property.
- Personal possessions must not be left unattended or taking up seating or space if needed by others.
- The Library reserves the right to inspect all bags, purses, briefcases, packs, etc. for Library materials.

4. Considerate Use of the Library

To ensure that patrons have a pleasant experience at the library that is free of distractions, the following behavior is prohibited:

- Running, pushing, shoving, or other unsafe physical behaviors.
- Putting feet or legs on or climbing on furniture.
- Spitting
- Playing in the elevator or stairwells
- Annoying other patrons

5. Phones

- Patrons desiring to use their phone to place or receive calls must do so outside of the Library building. Phones shall be placed on silent or vibrate mode upon entering the Library.

6. Loud Noise

- Shouting, talking, or making loud noises that interfere with other patrons' use and enjoyment of the library is not permitted. Loud noise is that which can be reasonably expected to disturb other persons or has the intent of annoying others.

7. Public Displays of Affection

- Patrons shall refrain from any sexual conduct or physical contact in the Library that is deemed inappropriate for a public place.

8. Odor

- Offensive odor, including but not limited to overpowering perfume or cologne is prohibited.

9. Sleeping

- Habitual sleepers, noisy sleepers, and those that are sprawled on the floor or on furniture in a manner that is disturbing to other patrons will not be tolerated.

10. Restrooms

- The misuse of restrooms, including but not limited to sleeping, shaving, bathing, hair cutting, or sexual activity is not allowed. Additionally, Library materials may not be taken into restrooms.

11. Food and Beverages

- Eating and drinking are only allowed as part of a Library sponsored event or in the Children's craft room with permission from the Children's Librarian.

12. Panhandling or Soliciting

- Panhandling or soliciting Library staff or patrons for money, services, or products in the Library building or on library grounds is strictly prohibited unless prior permission is obtained from the Library Director, and such sales of products or services are incidental to a Library program.

13. Distribution and Posting of Printed Materials

- The distribution and posting of printed materials and literature is not allowed without prior consent from the Library Director.

14. Campaigning, Petitioning, and Similar Activities

- Campaigning, petitioning, interviewing, survey-taking, distributing pamphlets, canvassing, and soliciting are not allowed in the Library building or on Library grounds, except when directly related to the Library and its mission.
- Campaign materials and literature may not be brought into the library or left on Library property.

IV. Rules for the Use and Preservation of Library Property and Materials

- Patrons shall not deface, abuse, vandalize, damage, or improperly remove library materials, furniture, or equipment. Patrons will be responsible to reimburse the Library for any costs incurred by violating this stipulation.
- Patrons must abide by all rules set forth by the Library for internet use. Patrons must relinquish their use of Library computers in a timely manner when asked to do so by a staff member.

- Library materials may only be removed from the premises after following the lending procedures established by the Library.
- Library phones and staff computers are for staff use only.

V. Disciplinary Process for Patron Behavior Policy Violations

The Library reserves the right to require anyone in violation of this patron behavior policy to immediately leave the premises, the right to suspend the patron's access to Library services and facilities for a specified period of time, and the right to ban the individual from the Library for a specified period of time or permanently.

1. Violation of the Policy

- *Initial Violation:* Library patrons observed violating this policy will be asked to cease the violation with a verbal request. If the patron does not comply with the verbal request, they will be asked to leave the building for the day. If the patron refuses, the police may be called.
- *Subsequent Violations:* The Library may further limit or suspend the patron's Library privileges if violations continue. Subsequent violations of the same rule shall result in additional suspensions of increasing length. Written documentation of the violation(s) will be provided to the patron.

2. Violations that Affect Safety and/or Security

- *Initial and Subsequent Violations:* The Police will be called immediately. Conduct that violates local, state, or federal law may result in arrest or criminal prosecution. Violations affecting Library safety or security will result in an immediate two-week suspension of Library privileges in order to give the Library sufficient time to investigate the policy violation. Written documentation of the violation(s) will be provided to the patron. After the investigation is completed, the Library reserves the right to extend the time of the suspension, place further restrictions on Library usage, or ban the patron for set period of time or permanently.

3. Right of Appeal

- Patrons whose privileges have been restricted or suspended may appeal this decision by sending a written appeal to the Library Board of Trustees within 7 business days of the date that the privileges were restricted or suspended. The decision of the Library Board of Trustees is final.

Adopted 9/11/23