



Fine Free FAQs

Fine free? Really? No fines?

You heard us correctly. As of January 3, 2023, the Allen County Public Library will no longer charge overdue fines for cardholders. All accounts will be cleared of their existing fines and no future overdue fines will accrue.

Like no fines ever?

This policy change refers specifically to overdue book fines. Cardholders will still be responsible for fees related to lost or damaged materials. They will also pay fees for things like printing, faxing, and other library services.

Wait. Doesn't that mean people will never return books?

Actually, the majority of libraries are now fine free and the data proves that going fine free does not affect if/how quickly people return books to the library. The return rates are the same before and after fine-free implementation.

And bonus – some libraries see more books come back because people are no longer ashamed to face high fine bills.

Double bonus – those who cannot afford fines are no longer excluded from the library. They already paid with their tax dollars, so they should be able to use the services.

But aren't we teaching people to be irresponsible?

Ok, some people will look at it that way. And of course, we all have a duty to hold each other accountable to sharing our library sources responsibly. Yes, teaching responsibility is important.

BUT, more important than anything is that we live our mission of fostering lifelong learning and discovery. We cannot do that, if people cannot access us. We must prioritize access over punitive, ineffective techniques to drive behavior.

The reality is that the fear of overdue fines does not actually deter people from being late. What it does do, however, is deter people from returning the book at all AND results in eventually blocking patron accounts completely. That is in no one's best interests.

Ok, but what about the money? Doesn't the library need fine revenue to function?

The ACPL has a strong, conservative fiscal plan that keeps us functioning at a high level without relying upon variable income like overdue fine revenue. Over the past 10 years, we've seen a significant decrease in the budget impacts of overdue fine revenue. It might seem like we're losing funds here. But let's talk about the actual cost of collecting overdue fines, including:

1. Staff time assigning fees and following up with patrons
2. Mailing and printing costs for overdue notices
3. Collection agency costs
4. Credit card fees

All of that adds up. In fact, many libraries have found that for every dollar they collect in overdue fines, they spend more than that dollar in staff time and collection costs. There's also the very real cost of alienating our patrons and putting strain on our staff. And all for less than 1% of our budget? It's simply not worth it.

This sounds radical, how do you know it will work?

It's actually not radical. In fact, libraries across the country have embraced fine free policies consistently over recent years. According to the Library Journal's "2022 Fines and Fees Survey", the percentage of U.S. libraries charging fines has decreased steadily. In 2017, 92% of libraries charged fines. Today, that number is only 36%.

We even tested it here at the ACPL with our Fine Free for Minors policy that took effect January 3, 2022. After tracking data, we saw major successes in just one year including:

1. The number of young patrons checking out materials grew by 151%
2. The number of items checked out by those youth totaled nearly 199,000 (an increase of 181% year over year).
3. The policy change brought new patrons to the library with an increase of more than 2000 youth cardholders from 2021 to 2022.
4. There was a 75% decrease in the number of blocked youth accounts.
5. There was no increase in number of unreturned books or replacement costs.

It worked for our youngest patrons and now more kids have access to books. Moving forward, more patrons will have that same access. That is good for all of us.

Alright, it's a good idea. So what do I need to do?

Nothing. Cardholders do not need to take any action to have fines removed. They will be automatically removed from accounts on Jan. 3, 2023. No further overdue fines will accumulate.

I used to use the library, but I haven't in a long time because of my fines. What do I need to do?

Well, let us be the first to say "Welcome back, we've missed you"! All you need to do is stop in a branch or go online and make sure your card is active. If it is, awesome. If not, swing by or sign up online for a free card.

Hey this is cool, but I JUST paid my fees. Can I get a refund?

Unfortunately, this change does not take effect until January 3, 2023 so any fines paid prior to that date cannot be refunded.

I have more questions, who do I ask?

For more information about the library going fine free, patrons can call (260) 421-1200 or visit a [local ACPL branch](#).