



Title: Library Services – Unattended Children

Category: Operating – Service Delivery

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Policy owner: Director of Corporate Services (Library Services)

Authorisation: Adopted March 2007 by the *Director of Corporate Services*

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Modification history: This is a new policy.

Related legislation: Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
New South Wales Library Act 1939

Related policies: *Library Service – Customer Exclusion*
Library Service – Conditions of Use

Related procedures: *Removing Disruptive Children from the Library*

Related forms: *Library User Guidelines brochure*

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to inform parents/ carer providers that the library does not assume responsibility for their children and to provide the guidelines to be used by staff in the event that a child is left unattended in the library. It is not the library's intention to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasoned response prepared when a problem presents itself.

1.1 Rationale

The safety and wellbeing of children left unattended in the library is a serious matter for library staff. Although staff will always respond with care and concern they cannot supervise children nor act as a substitute for childcare. Libraries do not have the facilities to attend to children who are sick, injured or hungry. Staff do not take over parental/carer responsibilities for children who come into the library and cannot be accountable for children who are left unattended or who are displaying inappropriate behaviour.

Young children left alone in the library can become distressed, bored or disruptive. Library users, including young people, who disturb other library users may be removed from the library under the Library Act 1939.

A child left unattended in the library, or a child habitually left unattended, may be deemed to be at risk under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, s23 and subsequently may be reported to the Department of Community Services under s24 or s27 of the Act.

Parents/care providers who leave a child unattended in a public library are exposing their child to potential harm, and may themselves be committing an offence under the Children and Young Person's (Care and protection) Act 1998, s228.

2. Objectives

- To ensure a pleasant and safe visit for children of all ages.
- To provide clear guidelines for procedures to be followed in the event that a child under 8 years or under is left unattended in the library.
- To establish guidelines which can be communicated to parents/care providers of young children using our libraries.

3. Scope

This policy applies to parents/care providers and children using the City of Canterbury Library.

4. Definitions

“City of Canterbury Library” or “the Library”: refers to all branches of the library service (Campsie, Earlwood, Lakemba and Riverwood).

Child: As per the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, this means a person under the age of 16 years

Unattended child: Any child under the age of 8 using the library, unaccompanied by a parent/care provider.

Parent/carer provider: includes the legal guardian of the child and a responsible person over the age of 16 years who has been delegated responsibility for the child by its parent or legal guardian.

5. Principles

5.1 Parental responsibility

All children from birth through to age 8 shall, at all times, be attended and adequately supervised by a responsible person. eg. an adult or mature adolescent over the age of 16 years. The parent/care provider must remain in the same area of the library unless the child is attending a library activity; in which case they must remain in the library building should an emergency arise.

Children aged 8 -10 may use the library on their own, but should not be left unattended for extended periods of time. Parents/care providers are responsible for their behaviour.

Children 10 years or older may use the library unattended providing they are mature enough to follow library rules and observe proper conduct.

Children of any age with mental, physical or emotional disabilities which affect decision making skills or render supervision necessary, must be accompanied by a parent/care provider at all times.

5.2 The Supervision of Children

The library provides a welcoming space for children to:

- Read
- Study
- Do homework
- Use computers
- Use the PlayStation
- Socialise with friends
- Discover new things

Although library staff take care to ensure the safety of all library users, they cannot provide child minding services, as they are not childcare workers.

Children under 8 years old must be accompanied and supervised by an adult at all times.

Children left unsupervised for prolonged periods can become distressed, bored and disruptive.

Parents/care providers are advised to be aware of the following procedures in relation to unsupervised children in the library:

- If children under 8 years old are found left alone without adult supervision, library staff will attempt to contact their parent/care provider.
- If they cannot be reached within a reasonable amount of time or they ignore these Library User Guidelines on the supervision of children, library staff will contact the NSW Police and/or NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) to ensure the child's safety.

5.3 Communication

The policy will be promoted to library users so a clear understanding of the guidelines for attendance of young children at our libraries is established.

We will ensure that library users are informed of the policy through displaying the policy at all libraries, providing all new borrowers with a "Guidelines for Library Users" leaflet, and through the Council website.

Parents/care providers who arrive late to pick up their child/children after closing time will be given a copy of the Conditions of Use leaflet and this policy.

Parents/care providers who contravene this policy and leave children unattended on more than one occasion will be issued a letter from the Director of Corporate Services accompanied by a copy of the policy and the *Conditions of Use* leaflet.

6. Responsibilities

- All Library Services staff have the responsibility of implementing this policy consistently across all locations of the library.
- Supervising staff on duty at the time a child is left unattended have responsibility for contacting parents/care providers and police where necessary and reporting the event in the incident book.

7. Procedures

- If a child aged under 8 years is found unattended in the library, staff will attempt to locate the parent/care provider in the library. If the parent/care provider is not within the library, staff will attempt to contact them by telephone. After a period of thirty minutes, if the parent/care provider has not been located, police will be called.

- Children aged 8-10 years using inappropriate behaviour may be asked to leave the library. All possible attempts will be made to contact the parent/care provider of the child/children. The *Removing Disruptive Children from the Library* procedure should be followed.
- Children 10 years or older are to follow library rules and observe proper conduct. If problems arise, they may be asked to leave, or their parent/care provider may be contacted. The child is legally the responsibility of their parent/care provider and should have the telephone number of someone who can assist them in an emergency.
- Children of any age left unattended at closing time may be deemed at risk and appropriate action will be taken. Two members of staff will remain with the child and attempt to contact the parent/care provider. If the parent/care provider has not arrived within 15 minutes of closing time and it has not been possible to make contact, the police will be called. Two staff will remain with the child until the police arrive.
- All instances of unattended children are to be reported in the Incident Book and entered on the “Unattended Children” spreadsheet at W:\administration & library management\customer service\unattended children.xls.
- Upon collection of children, parents are to be advised of the library policy regarding unattended children and cautioned. Parents / carers are to be given a copy of the “Library User Guidelines” brochure.
- If children are identified as having been left unattended on more than one occasion a letter approved by the Director of Corporate Services will be sent to the parents/care provider of the child(ren) involved along with a copy of the policy on unattended children.

7.1 Complaints

- All occurrences of unattended children will be documented in the Incident Book and reported to the Client Services Co-ordinator and Manager, Library Services.
 - Any complaint / appeal will be dealt with in the first instance by the Shift Supervisor.
 - Complaints / appeals that cannot be resolved at this level will be referred to the Manager, Library Services or an authorised delegate (Co-ordinator Client Services or Co-ordinator Support Services).
 - If the customer remains unsatisfied, they may write to:

Mr. Jim Montague
General Manager
Canterbury City Council
PO Box 77 CAMPSIE NSW 2194