



Safety of Children in the Library

Subject: Safety of Children in the Library

Type: OPERATIONAL

Approved: May 28, 2024

Next Review: 2028

Purpose:

Middlesex County Library welcomes and encourages children of all ages to enjoy the Library's programs, services, collections and spaces. Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children using the Library ultimately rests with the parent/legal guardian or an assigned caregiver who is no less than 12 years of age. Library staff are not responsible for the supervision or security of children on the library premises.

Scope:

This policy applies to all children who are under twelve (12) years of age and their parent/guardian/caregiver, in all Library locations.

Policy:

Children of all ages are welcome in the Library and are encouraged to enjoy programs, services, collections and spaces. While the Library aims to provide a safe environment for all users, parents/guardians/caregivers are responsible for providing supervision and care for their children while the child is on Library property.

Unattended Children in the Library

- Children who are seven (7) years of age or under must be accompanied by a parent/guardian/caregiver while inside the Library.
- Children who are eight (8) to eleven (11) years of age may use the Library on their own; however, parents/guardians/caregivers are responsible for the actions and the well-being of their child(ren). If a child in this age group is not able to leave the Library without an adult, they should not be in the Library alone. All children should have the telephone number of someone who can assist them in an emergency, and the ability to communicate this information.

Responsibility of Parent, Guardian or Caregiver

- Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children using the Library ultimately rests with the parent/guardian/caregiver. The Library expects parents/guardians/caregivers to:
 - Not leave children requiring supervision unattended in or about Library property;
 - Monitor the use of services and resources by children under their care;
 - Be responsible for borrowed materials and fees incurred by children under their care;
 - Ensure children under their care behave appropriately according to the *Code of Conduct*.
- Parents/guardians/caregivers will be required to attend programs with children who are seven (7) and under.
- Parents/guardians/caregivers may be required to attend programs with older children depending on the nature of the program. Such requirements will be clearly stated in program promotion and registration.

Responsibility of Library Staff

- Library Staff will follow this policy in all situations where an unattended child is found inside the Library.
- Library staff should intervene when they become aware that a child in the Library is in these or similar situations:
 - A child is alone and visibly upset or ill;
 - A child under the age of twelve (12) is left alone with younger siblings;
 - A child is alone and doing something dangerous or another person in the library seems to be a danger to the child;
 - A child is alone and is not following library rules after reasonable warnings;
 - A child is left alone at the library at closing time.
- If staff are unable to contact/locate the responsible parent/guardian/caregiver, they should:
 - Not leave a child unattended at closing time;
 - Not give a child a ride home;
 - Contact local police or Children's Aid Society (CAS);
 - Remain with the child until the proper authorities can take the child into their protection.

Duty To Report

- The Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) clearly states that all members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have a legislated obligation to report promptly to the CAS if they suspect that a child or youth under the age of sixteen (16) is, or may be, in need of protection. The CYFSA defines the phrase “child in need of protection” as including physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.
- It is not necessary to be certain a child is, or may be, in need of protection to make a report to a society. “Reasonable grounds” refers to the information that an average person, using normal and honest judgement, would need in order to decide to report. When Library staff members have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is, or may be, in need of protection, they will promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based, to the local CAS.
- A staff person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must make the report directly and must not rely on anyone else to report on his or her behalf.
- A staff person making a report as an employee of the library shall inform the Director of Library Services and complete an incident report as soon as possible.

Requests for Information Regarding Truant Children

- As a public facility, the Library does not monitor the activities of its members unless there is a problem with conduct or a child is inappropriately left alone as outlined above.
- If a school age child is noticed to be spending considerable time in the library during the school day, staff may check with the child and connect with CAS for guidance if there are concerns about a child’s well-being or if the child discloses abuse.

Requests for Information Regarding Missing Children/Runaways

- Staff will not give information to any person over the telephone as to whether a child is currently in the library or has been in the library recently. Staff may offer to take a message and ask the child to call the person back. In the case of a missing child, staff should contact the Director of Library Services or designate to share information with the law enforcement agency requesting specific personal information.



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Phone Numbers

Children's Aid Society: 1-888-661-6167

Ontario Provincial Police: 1-888-310-1122 (non-emergency line)

Strathroy Caradoc Police Service: 519-245-1250 (non-emergency line)

Related Documents

Code of Conduct – Library Policy – Administration 3.4

Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017