

## **Policy: Operational - Unattended Children**

**Department: Library**

**Effective Date: April 2016**

**Revision Date: December 2023**

**Next Year of Review: 2025**

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The Bruce County Public Library recognizes that children of all ages have a right to a welcoming, respectful, supportive and safe environment when they visit the library.

However, the library is a busy public place and library staff cannot assume responsibility for children left unattended within our public facility. The following policy establishes the conditions needed to maintain the well-being of children and the responsibilities of their caregivers.

### **Section 1: Responsibilities of the Parent or Caregiver**

1. Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children using the library ultimately rests with the parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver.
2. The library is governed by the terms in the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) with regards to the supervision of children.

#### **Section 136(3) Leaving child unattended**

“No person having charge of a child less than 16 years of age shall leave the child without making provision for his or her supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances.”

- This legislation does not specify an age at which a child can be left alone, rather the legislation sets out to protect young people from any type of abuse or neglect and requires that all parents and caregivers must make reasonable plans (which will vary according to a child’s age, maturity and circumstances) for the supervision of young people under 16 in their care.

3. Parents must ensure that children requiring supervision are brought to the library with a responsible caregiver. The library expects parents, guardians, and caregivers to:

- a) not leave children requiring supervision unattended in or about library premises
- b) monitor the use of services and collections by children under their care
- c) be responsible for borrowed materials and fines incurred by children under their care
- d) be responsible for the appropriate behaviour of children under their care

4. Children requiring supervision must be accompanied by an adult or responsible caregiver while in the Library. Parents are responsible for the behaviour of any children while in the library, whether they are supervised or not.

5. Library staff will not prevent a child from leaving the building. If a child is not able to leave the library alone, they should not be at the library unsupervised.
6. Children who are attending programs may be supervised by library staff only during the scheduled time of the program.

## **Section 2: Responsibility of Staff**

1. Library staff will intervene when they become aware that a child in the Library is in the following or similar circumstances:
  - a) an unattended child is found frightened or crying in the library
  - b) an unattended child is perceived to be endangering him/herself
  - c) another person in the library poses a perceived threat to the unattended child
  - d) an unattended child exhibits specific inappropriate behaviour
  - e) an unattended child is not met by a responsible caregiver at closing time
  - f) a child is consistently left on his or her own in the library for long periods of time
2. The primary goal of library staff is to ensure the safety of the child by returning the child to the care and custody of the caregiver. If staff become aware of a concern related to an unattended child, they will take the following steps:
  - a) Approach the child and identify themselves as a Library Staff member.
  - b) Work with the child to locate or contact the responsible parent, guardian or caregiver
  - c) remain with the child until they are safe
    - i) under no circumstances will staff leave a child unattended at closing time or give a child a ride home.
  - d) Contact the local police or Children's Aid Society if the child is in immediate need of protection or if no one can be located.

### **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, Library staff will share information with the law enforcement agency requesting specific personal information.

## **Section 3: Duty to Report**

1. The CYFSA recognizes that each of us has a responsibility for the welfare of children. It clearly states that members of the public including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report promptly to the Children's Aid Society if they suspect that a child or youth under the age of 16 is or may be in need of protection. The CYFSA defines the phrase "child in need of protection" as including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm. Staff who are concerned that a 16- or 17-year-old is, or may be, in need of protection may make a report to the Children's Aid Society (CAS) and CAS is required to assess the reported information.

3. When library staff members have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, they will advise the Chief Executive Officer and together they will promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to the local CAS, as stated in the CYFSA s.125(1).

### **Related Documents**

Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1

Bruce County Public Library. OP Circulation Policy

Bruce County Public Library. OP Internet Services Policy