

**UNATTENDED CHILDREN**

**Procedure 2.8.5**

Policy No. and title	2.8	Library Service Policy
Procedure	2.8.5	Unattended Children
Version	1	
Date Adopted	23 August 2012	

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**1 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 less than eight years of age is left unattended in the Library.
- To inform parents/caregivers that the Library does not assume responsibility for their children and to provide guidelines to be used in the event that a child is left unattended in the Library.

**2 RATIONALE**

- a) 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.
- b) 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.
- c) 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.
- d) 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, Section 228.

**3 STATEMENT**

**3.1 Parental Responsibility**

- a) All children under 8 years old shall, at all times, be attended and adequately supervised by a responsible person e.g. an adult or mature adolescent over the age of 16 years. School age children must remain within sight of the parent/care provider unless the child is attending a Library activity. Pre-school age children must remain within sight of the parent/care provider at all times.

- b) Children aged eight to nine 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.
- c) Children 10 years or older may use the Library unattended providing they are mature enough to follow Library rules and observe proper conduct.
- d) Children of any age with mental, physical or emotional disabilities which affect behaviour or decision making skills which render supervision necessary, must be accompanied by a parent/care provider at all times.

### **3.2 Communication**

- a) The procedure will be promoted to Library users so a clear understanding of the guidelines for attendance of young children at our libraries is established.
- b) We will ensure that Library users are informed of the procedures through displaying the procedures at all libraries.
- c) Parents/care providers who arrive late to pick up their child/children after closing time will be given a copy of this procedure.
- d) Parents/care providers who contravene this procedure and leave children unattended on more than one occasion will be issued a letter from the Director of Community Engagement along with a copy of Conditions of Use Procedure.

## **4 RESPONSIBILITIES**

- a) Although Library staff takes care to ensure the safety of all Library users, they cannot provide child minding services, as they are not childcare workers.
- b) 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.

## **5 ACTIONS**

- a) If a child aged under eight 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 the police and/or NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) will be contacted to ensure the child's safety.
- b) Children aged eight to ten 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.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.

- e) All instances of unattended children are to be reported in the Incident Book.
- f) Upon collection of children, parents are to be advised of the Library Procedure regarding unattended children and cautioned.
- g) If children are identified as having been left unattended on more than one occasion a letter approved by the Director of Community Engagement will be sent to the parents/care provider of the child(ren) involved along with a copy of the Conditions of Use Procedure.

## **VARIATION**

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this procedure which will be reviewed periodically to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.