

OP 11 Unattended Children

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| Policy Type: | Operational | Policy Number: | OP 11 |
| | | Policy Approval Date: | May 30, 2013 |
| Policy Title: | Unattended Children | Policy Review Date: | November 2, 2023 |
| | | Next Review Date: | November 2027 |

1.0 Purpose

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library Board 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 the public facility. This policy establishes the conditions needed to maintain the well-being of children and the responsibilities of their caregivers.

2.0 Responsibilities of the Parent or Caregiver

Responsibility for the welfare and the behavior of children using the library ultimately rests with the parent, guardian or assigned caregiver.

The Library is governed by the terms in the *Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)* with regards to supervision of children.

Specifically, from 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.

To this end, the library expects parents, caregivers and teachers to:

- not leave children under the age of 16, requiring supervision, unattended in or about Library premises;
- monitor the use of services and collections by children under their care;
- be responsible for the appropriate behavior of children under their care; and
- be responsible for borrowed materials and fines incurred by children under their care.

Children shall be accompanied as follows:

- children under the age of four years attending Library programs must be accompanied by the parent or caregiver.
- children aged four to ten years attending programs may be supervised by the library staff only during the scheduled time of the program and their parent or caregiver must always remain in the Library building.
- children ten years old and younger must be accompanied by an adult while in the Library.

3.0 Responsibility of Staff

Library staff members will be guided by this policy in situations, where:

- an unattended child is found frightened or crying in the Library;
- an unattended child is perceived to be endangering themselves or others;
- another person in the Library poses a perceived threat to the unattended child;
- an unattended child exhibits specific inappropriate behavior;
- an unattended child is not met by a responsible caregiver at closing time; or
- a child is consistently left on their own in the Library for long periods of time.

Where a responsible adult cannot be contacted, Library staff will:

- not leave a child unattended at closing time;
- not give the child a ride home;
- contact local police or the Children's Aid Society (CAS); and
- remain with the child until the proper authorities can take the child into their protection.

4.0 Duty to Report

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 (CAS) 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.

The duty to report applies to any child who is, or appears to be, under the age of 16 years. It also applies to children subject to a child protection order who are 16 and 17 years old.

When Library staff members have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, they will advise the CEO and together they will promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to the local CAS.

5.0 Related Documents

Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. S.O. 2017, CHAPTER C.14, sections 74, 84 (1), 125, 136 (3).

OP10 – Children & YA Services Policy

OP17 - Rules of Conduct-Patrons Policy

OP04 – Collection Development Policy

OP07 - Internet Services Policy

OP12 - Membership Policy