

Unattended Children Guidelines



Document No:	Record No:
Version: 1.0	Last Amendment: 30 May 2022
Owner/sponsor:	Executive Director, Library & Information Services and Dixson Librarian
Contact officer:	Coordinator, Information & Access
Approved by:	Executive Committee
Date approved:	18 October 2022
Next review:	18 October 2025

Purpose

These guidelines outline the responsibilities of parents, guardians and carers with regard to their child's use of the State Library of New South Wales (the Library). It also details the responsibilities of library staff if and when unattended children are deemed to be at risk in the Library. This document is framed with reference to the *Library Act 1939* (NSW) and the *Library Regulation 2018* (NSW) and should be looked at in conjunction with the Library's Child Safe Policy.

Key Principles

The Library strives to provide a welcoming environment and is committed to serving the information and recreation needs of children and young people. The Library does not offer services provided professionally by other agencies including child care and formal education.

Target audience

Readers and visitors as well as library staff.

Operational requirements

The Library offers a range of services for children and young people including:

- The Children's Library
- The Family Room - a space for under 5's and their carers
- a browsing collection of fiction, non-fiction and recreational books
- spaces for activities, reading and study
- assistance from staff in accessing collections and information
- computer and internet access
- ebooks and eresources
- storytime and other early learning programs
- onsite excursions for schools
- school holiday activities
- online programs and activities.

Unattended Children

Children under 12 years of age must not be left unsupervised in the Library. Unsupervised children and young people can be at risk in any public place, including libraries. Library staff do not supervise children and there is a risk that unattended children may leave the library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers. Children left alone in a library can also become distressed or disruptive.

Parents/guardians must remain within the building for the length of the child's visit. Library staff may question an unattended child to establish the reason they are attending the Library or length of their visit.

Procedure

1. Staff will identify an unattended child when:
 - a child is under the age of 12 and has been left unsupervised
 - a child is found to be unsupervised during an emergency building evacuation
 - a child is found distressed in the Library
 - a child is perceived to be endangering themselves or someone else
 - a child exhibits behaviour that breaches the Reader and Visitor Code of Conduct
 - a child has not been met by a parent/guardian at closing time.
2. Staff will contact security
3. Security will seek the parent/guardian of the unattended child in the Library
4. Security will contact the Security Manager/Security Coordinator to report the situation
5. If the parent/guardian of an unattended child is not located in the Library, then:
 - security will contact the parent/guardian by phone and ask them to attend the Library within an agreed timeframe
 - security will give a copy of these guidelines to the parent/guardian upon arrival
 - security will complete an incident form
6. Security will call NSW Police to attend the library if a parent/guardian is unable to be located or contacted within a reasonable timeframe.

Reporting

There may be occasions where a staff member is concerned for the welfare and wellbeing of an unattended child who is aged between 12 to 18. Staff may seek out the child's parent/guardian if there are behavioural concerns or risks associated with the lack of supervision.

If there are repeat instances of the same child being left unattended for extended periods, the child may be classed as a child at risk of harm under section 23 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) and may be reported as such to the Secretary of the Department of Family & Community Services.

Parents who leave a child unattended in a library are exposing their child to potential harm, and may be committing an offence under section 228 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW).

Responsibilities

The Executive Committee is responsible for:

- ensuring the guidelines are reviewed every three years
- decision making in relation to children thought to be at risk of harm under section 23 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW) including reporting to the Secretary of the Department of Family & Community Services.

Security Manager and Coordinators are responsible for:

- ensuring that all security officers are aware of these guidelines and associated procedure
- investigating if a child has been left unattended in the Library
- seeking to locate the parents/guardian of the child
- explaining the responsibilities of the parent/guardian and potential risk of leaving a child unattended in the Library and documenting the interaction
- contacting the NSW Police to attend the Library if a parent/guardian is unable to be located or contacted within a reasonable timeframe

Manager, I&A is responsible for:

- Ensuring I&A staff are aware of these guidelines
- Encouraging I&A staff to be alert for children left unsupervised for extended periods.

Coordinator, I&A is responsible for:

- communicating the guidelines to staff and readers
- drafting correspondence to parents/guardians as required
- reviewing the guidelines every three years and submitting to Executive Committee for approval
- remaining aware of relevant legislation and policies.

Security officers are responsible for:

- being alert for children left unsupervised for extended periods
- contacting the Security Manager or Security Coordinator to report the situation
- remaining with a child who has been found distressed in the Library until the parent/guardian has been located
- logging the details of the situation in the security occurrence book.

All staff are responsible for:

- Being aware of the guidelines
- Speaking to a supervisor if they observe a child left unsupervised

Related Key Legislation and Policy

Library Act 1939 (NSW)

Library Regulation 2018 (NSW)

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)

Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth)

Reader and Visitor Code of Conduct (SLNSW)

Document history and version control

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1.0	18 October 2022	Executive	First Release