



Hastings Highlands Public Library

Area: Operational

Policy Title: Children in the Library

Policy Number: OP-11

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Year of next review: 2030

The Hastings Highlands Public Library welcomes children and youth of all ages. Library staff recognize that children and youth 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 in the Library. The Library is not a childcare facility. The following policy establishes the responsibilities of Library staff, parents, guardians, and caregivers and provides guidance for situations involving children and youth using the Library.

DEFINITIONS

In this policy:

- **Parent/guardian** is any person who has legal responsibility for the child.
- **Caregiver** is a responsible person designated by a parent or guardian to supervise and care for a child.
- **Child requiring supervision** is a child whose age, maturity, ability, behaviour, circumstances, or other factors indicate that they require supervision while using the Library.
- **Supervised Library program** is a program specifically designated by the Library as one in which Library staff provide supervision of participating children or youth during the scheduled program time. A parent, guardian, or caregiver must complete the Library's required permission form before the child or youth participates in the program.

PRINCIPLES

1. The conduct of all patrons must show respect for the comfort and safety of patrons and Library staff (see OP-18A Children's Code of Conduct).
2. Responsibility for the welfare and behaviour of children using the Library rests with the parent, guardian, or assigned caregiver.
3. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are responsible for making reasonable arrangements for the supervision and care of children in their care.
4. Children requiring supervision must be accompanied by a responsible parent, guardian, or caregiver while in the Library.

5. The Library does not provide general childcare or assume responsibility for supervising children outside of designated Library programs.
6. The Library does not routinely collect or record the age or date of birth of children for the purpose of determining whether they may use the Library independently. Staff will not routinely ask children their age or require proof of age in order for a child to use the Library.
7. Library staff will exercise reasonable judgment based on the circumstances and will intervene when there is a concern about a child's safety, welfare, behaviour, or need for assistance.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 1: Responsibilities of the Parent, Guardian or Caregiver

1. The Library expects parents, guardians, and caregivers to:
 - a) make reasonable arrangements for the supervision and care of children under their care;
 - b) not leave children requiring supervision unattended in or about Library premises;
 - c) monitor the use of services and collections by children under their care;
 - d) be responsible for the appropriate behaviour of children under their care; and
 - e) be responsible for borrowed materials and applicable charges incurred by children under their care.
1. Parents, guardians, and caregivers remain responsible for children in their care when children are permitted to use the Library independently.
2. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are responsible for ensuring that children understand and follow the Library's Code of Conduct and applicable Library rules.

Section 2: Library Programs

1. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are responsible for the supervision and care of children attending Library programs. For programs specifically designated by the Library as supervised Library programs, Library staff will provide supervision during the scheduled program time, provided the required permission form has been completed.
2. For Library programs where Library staff do not provide supervision, a parent, guardian, or caregiver must remain in the Library for the duration of the program.
3. A completed Library permission form is required before a child or youth may participate in a supervised Library program.
4. Library staff supervision is limited to the scheduled time of the program. Parents, guardians, and caregivers remain responsible for children before the program begins and after the program ends.
5. Children participating in Library programs are expected to follow the Library's Code of Conduct and the directions of Library staff.

Section 3: Responsibility of Library Staff

Library staff will respond in accordance with this policy when:

- a) an unattended child is found frightened, distressed, or crying in the Library;
- b) an unattended child is perceived to be endangering themselves or others;

- c) another person in the Library poses a perceived threat to an unattended child;
- d) an unattended child exhibits inappropriate or significantly disruptive behaviour;
- e) a child requiring supervision is left unattended at closing time;
- f) a child is consistently left on their own in the Library for long periods of time; or
- g) a child is perceived to require medical attention or protection.

When intervention is required, Library staff will:

- 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 when necessary to ensure their safety;
- d) make reasonable efforts to reunite the child with their parent, guardian, or caregiver; and
- e) contact police, emergency services, or the appropriate children's aid society when necessary.

Parents, guardians, and caregivers are responsible for determining whether a child can safely leave the Library independently. Library staff cannot assume responsibility for ensuring that a child is met by a parent, guardian, or caregiver at closing.

If a child remains unattended after closing, Library staff will take reasonable steps to contact the child's parent, guardian, or caregiver and to ensure the child's safety. Where the responsible adult cannot be reached, or where staff have concerns about the child's immediate safety or welfare, staff may contact police, emergency services, or a children's aid society, as appropriate.

Under no circumstances will Library staff give a child a ride home.

Section 4: Requests for Information Regarding Children

To protect the privacy and safety of children and youth, Library staff will not disclose by telephone or other means whether a particular child or youth is currently in the Library or has recently been in the Library, except where disclosure is authorized or required by law.

Staff may offer to take a message for the child or ask the child to contact the person directly.

Requests for information from police, a children's aid society, or another authorized agency will be handled in accordance with applicable legislation and Library privacy policies.

DUTY TO REPORT

1. Library staff are required to comply with the duty to report under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA), as amended.
2. When a Library staff member has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is, or may be, in need of protection, the staff member must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based directly to a children's aid society, as required by the CYFSA.
3. A staff member who makes a report will advise the Chief Executive Officer as soon as reasonably possible, provided that doing so does not delay or interfere with the staff member's duty to report, and will follow applicable internal reporting procedures.
4. Library staff who are concerned that a youth aged 16 or 17 is, or may be, in need of protection may make a report to a children's aid society in accordance with the CYFSA.

RECURRING CONCERNS

1. Where a child is repeatedly left unattended in circumstances that indicate they require supervision, Library staff may speak with the parent, guardian, or caregiver about the Library's expectations and the need to make reasonable arrangements for the child's supervision and care.
2. Where concerns continue despite reasonable efforts to address them, the Library may take further action in accordance with applicable Library policies and legislation.
3. Staff should document significant incidents and actions taken in accordance with the Library's applicable incident-reporting and privacy procedures.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

1. Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, as amended.
2. Hastings Highlands Public Library, OP-12 – Circulation Policy
3. Hastings Highlands Public Library, OP-07 – Internet Access Policy
4. Hastings Highlands Public Library, OP-18A – Children's Code of Conduct
5. Hastings Highlands Public Library, OP-01 Confidentiality and the Protection of Privacy