

NAME: Children in the Library - Policy

DATE: October 2024

Port Macquarie Hastings Library Service is committed to serving the information and recreation needs of young people. The Library strives to provide a welcoming environment, and provides targeted resources and programs to meet the needs of young people.

The Port Macquarie Hastings Library's services to young people include:

- Fiction and non-fiction books
- Picture books and board books
- Graphic novels
- Magazines
- Audiobooks
- CDs and DVDs
- Science kits
- Ten Minutes a Day Packs
- Literacy book packs
- Schools Collection
- Ebooks and eresources
- Computer and internet access
- Literacy programs
- Assistance from staff in accessing collections and information
- Space for activities or study

Unsupervised children

Unsupervised children can be at risk in any public place, including public libraries. Port Macquarie Hastings Library Service staff do not supervise children in the library and there is a risk that unattended children may leave the library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers. Libraries are busy public places, open to all, and staff cannot judge which members of the public present a possible danger to children. Libraries do not have the facilities to attend to children who are sick, injured or hungry.

Children left unattended in a public library may be classed as a child or young person at risk of harm under s. 23 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and may be

reported as such to The Department of Family & Community Services (FACS). Parents who leave a child unattended in a public library are exposing their child to potential harm and may be committing an offence under s. 228 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. Young children left alone in a library can become distressed, bored or disruptive. Young people who disturb other library users may be removed from the Library under clause 17 of the Library Regulation 2018.

The purpose of this policy is to inform parents/carers that the library does not assume responsibility for their children and to provide guidelines to be used by staff in the event that a child is left unattended in the library.

Objectives:

- To ensure that the Library is safe for young persons from a Work, Health & Safety point of view, and that library staff take reasonable care to ensure that the Library is safe and welcoming for all library users.
- That procedures are developed and staff are made aware of them in the event that a child is left unattended or is disruptive in the library.
- To establish guidelines that can be communicated to parents/carers of young people using our libraries.

Port Macquarie Hastings Library Service cannot take responsibility for children in libraries. The libraries are not a licensed child-minding facility, and therefore cannot provide supervision of children. Library staff do not assume parental or professional responsibility for children when they come into the library.

- Library staff do not supervise children in the Library.
- All children **under the age of 8 years** must be supervised by a responsible adult or mature adolescent who is 16 years or older.
- Supervision requires that the person be within sight of the child at all times.
- Parents/carers can be asked by staff to correct the behaviour of their child/children.
- It is possible that unattended children may leave the library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers.
- Library staff will attempt to contact parents or carers if children of any age are in distress or unattended for an unreasonable length of time. If parents/carers cannot be contacted, NSW Police or the Department of Family & Community Services may be contacted.
- Port Macquarie Hastings Library Service cannot control what children borrow (other than material classified as being unavailable to minors) and it is the parents/carers responsibility for the child's use of resources and facilities.

Children deemed to be at risk:

If library staff consider a child is at risk because they have been left alone in the library for a significant period or they have been observed being left unattended at the library on a regular basis, these procedures will be followed:

- The parents/carer will be contacted in person or by telephone. The parents/carer will be advised that under current legislation it is illegal to leave children inappropriately without supervision.
- If the parents/carer ignore this policy or are not able to be contacted, the situation will be reported to the Library Manager who may then report the incident to the Child Protection Helpline 132 111 or to the NSW Police.

Disruptive Behaviour:

Library Staff are committed to ensure all patrons enjoy a productive and rewarding experience. The behaviour of children on library premises is the responsibility of the children themselves, their parents/carers or any responsible person accompanying them, or if in a school group, their teachers and supervisors. If the child is behaving in a manner which is disruptive to other library patrons or damaging to library property, the following procedures will be followed:

- Library staff members may ask the child/children to modify their behaviour.
- If after 1 warning, the behaviour is not modified the staff member has the right to tell the child/children to leave the library.
- Parents/carers can be asked by staff to correct the behaviour of their child/children.

Sick/Injured children in the library:

In the case of sick/injured children, library staff will:

- contact the First Aid Officer for assistance
- Library staff will contact the parent/carer if they are not present.
- In the event of serious sickness or injury, staff will call an ambulance.

Children not collected at closing time:

If a child has not been collected by the Library's closing time they are at risk. In such cases, these procedures will be followed:

- 2 staff will remain with the child and staff will attempt to contact the parent/carer.
- If parents/carer cannot be contacted after 15 mins, staff will contact Police to collect the child. Both staff will wait with the child until the Police have arrived.

Access to internet facilities

Parents/guardians of young people are solely responsible for the young person's access to and use of the library's internet facilities, including access to sites, their subject matter and content.

Last Review by Penelope Evans – Children's Librarian

Date of Last Review October 2024

Date of Next Review October 2028

Indicate the name of the reviewer when updating this document.