

# Guideline



## Unattended children in the Library

### Introduction

Central Coast Library Service welcomes children of all ages and their parents and carers to use our library spaces and facilities and to enjoy our programs and events. The Library Service has a duty of care to all library users and staff to ensure their safety, comfort, and wellbeing and that no one is placed in a situation where they are at risk.

This guideline details the responsibilities of parents and carers and the steps library staff are to undertake if a child under 12 is left unattended in a library space or at an event or Outreach program.

### Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to inform parents/cares that the library is not responsible for the supervision and care of children as they do not have the facilities or appropriate government approvals to attend to children who are sick, injured, or hungry and that libraries are not to be used as an alternative to licensed care facilities.

Unsupervised children under the age of 12 can be at risk of hurting themselves, of being harmed or of being approached by strangers in any public space, including public libraries.

Children left unattended may be classed as being at risk of harm under section 23 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW) and as such may be

reported to the Department of Family & Community Services (FACS).

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

It is not the library's intention to seek out unattended children, but rather to have a reasoned response prepared if the situation presents itself.

### Statement

Library staff cannot assume parental/carer responsibilities for children using the library or attending library events or Outreach programs and they are not accountable for children who may display inappropriate behaviour.

A responsible parent/carer must accompany children under the age of 12 whilst they are using library services. Parents/carers are responsible for their child's welfare as well as monitoring and regulating their behaviour.

Staff will therefore seek out parents/carers if:

- A child is found frightened or crying in the library or at an event or Outreach program
- A child exhibits inappropriate behaviour crying in the library or at an event or Outreach program
- A child appears to be in the library or at an event or Outreach program without a responsible parent/carer beyond a reasonable period

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## Unattended children in the Library

- A child has not been met by a responsible parent/carer at closing/finishing time

If a parent/carer is not located within the library or at an event or Outreach program:

- A phone call will be made to the parent/carer, and they will be asked to pick up their child immediately and that if they do not appear as soon as possible FACS will be notified via the Child Protection Helpline: 132 111, and that staff will be guided by FACS in terms of subsequent police reporting.
- If the child is a library member, their contact information will be gathered from their account.
- If a current phone number is not accessible in their membership record, and the child does not know their parent/carer phone number, staff will immediately inform FACS by calling the Child Protection Helpline: 132 111
- If a library is located within a shopping centre, security will be asked to make an announcement re: the child in the library

If a parent/carer has been contacted but does not arrive to pick up the child within 1 hour of the call:

- Staff will report the unattended child to the Child Protection Helpline: 132 111
- Staff will continue to try to contact the parent/carer to discuss child pick up and alternate emergency contact information

If the child is unattended at closing/finishing time;

- Staff will seek advice from the Child Protection Helpline: 132 111 and phone the Police Assistance Line on 131 444 to request collection of the child
- Staff will continue to try to contact the parent/carer if details are available
- Two (2) staff members will wait with the child on library premises or at the event or Outreach program until they are collected by a parent/carer, Family and Community Services or the police
- Staff will not, under any circumstances drive the child to any location

Should a language interpreter be required staff should phone the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 to obtain immediate assistance.

Staff will report incident details to the Incident Hotline and place a note on the membership record.

The parent/carer will be given a copy of this guideline upon their arrival to pick up the child

### Related resources

[Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998](#)

### Ask us a question

Please contact us at:

[Library@centralcoast.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Library@centralcoast.nsw.gov.au)