Safety and Well-being of Children Policy

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Policy Category:	Public Service
Approved by:	OPL Board
Accountability:	CEO or Designate
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Supersedes:	

Purpose:

Oakville Public Library (OPL) is committed to providing a welcoming and safe environment for customers of all ages to enjoy the library's programs, collections, services and spaces. Library staff work to engage children, families and teens in positive ways, and provide support while in library spaces and while attending library events or programs both in-person and virtually. All customers are expected to abide by the library's Customer Code of Conduct.

The OPL endorses the Ontario Library Association's position statements on Children's Rights in the Library (1998) and Teens' Rights (June 2010).

This policy provides clarity regarding parent / guardian responsibilities and OPL's responsibility for the safety of children in library spaces and while attending library events or programs both in-person and virtually.

Scope:

This policy applies to children and youth under the age of 18 while they are in a library space or while attending a library program or event in-person or virtually.

Policy Statement:

Parents or guardians are responsible for the behaviour and safety of their children who use the library, its collections, equipment and services. Library staff are trained to assist children but cannot assume responsibility for the safety and well-being of children left unattended in the library.

The library recognizes the terms as stipulated by the Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) with respect to the supervision of children. Specifically, Duty to Report, Section 125.

Children in the Library

In-person:

Children younger than 10 years of age must be directly supervised by a parent or responsible caregiver and may not be left alone in the library. Parents and caregivers are responsible for ensuring that children abide by the library's Customer Code of Conduct. During library programs, the parent or caregiver of a child under the age of 10 must remain in the library and return to the programming area by the end of the program. For some programs, parents / caregivers are required to attend with their children.

Virtual:

Adult permission is mandatory for children under the age of 13 participating in the library's virtual programs. The library cannot and does not act in place of, or absence of, a parent of legal guardian and is not responsible for enforcing restrictions which a parent or guardian may place upon a minor's use of technology. While all virtual programs encourage the use of cameras during programs for social interaction, virtual programs for children, under the age of 13 require cameras to be on for attendance and security purposes.

Children over the Age of 10

Children 10 years of age and up to 18 may use the library independently, but parents / caregivers are responsible for the actions and well-being of their children while in the library and/or library programs in-person or virtually. Library staff are entitled to assess the behaviour of a child left alone in the library and address any concerns with the caregiver.

Unattended Children in the Library

Library staff will intervene when they become aware that a child in the library is in these or similar situations:

- A child is alone and visibly upset or ill;

- A child under the age of 12 is left alone with younger children;

- A child is left alone and doing something dangerous or appears to be at risk;

- A child is alone and is not following library behaviour expectations after reasonable reminders;

- A child is left alone at closing time or before opening outside the library doors;

- A child is spending a considerable amount of time in the library alone.

If a child is left alone and a parent or caregiver cannot be located, the library will contact the Halton Regional Police Service or Halton Children's Aid Society.

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 CAS if they suspect a child or youth under the age of 18 is or may be in need of protection.

The duty to report applies to any child who is, or appears to be, under the age of 18 years.

When library staff have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection they have the authority to report the concern to the local CAS as stated in CYFSA s. 125 (1). If in doubt, staff should contact the local CAS.

Requests for information regarding children

As a public facility, the library does not monitor the activities of its customers of any age unless there is an issue with their conduct. OPL respects the privacy of all its customers. Staff will not give information to any person over the phone as to whether a child is currently in the library or has been in the library recently. Information will be shared with law enforcement agencies as required.

Definitions:

Child / Children refers to all persons who are below the age of 18.

Parent refers to a person who is either the natural, adoptive or foster parent of a child.

Guardian refers to a person with legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child.

Caregiver is anyone age 12 or older to whom the parent / guardian has given responsibility for the care of the child.

Unattended child refers to a child left without visible supervision by a parent, guardian or caregiver. Visible supervision is defined as the parent, guardian or caregiver being in the library and aware of the child's whereabouts in the space.

Staff refers to library employees, volunteers and community partners in shared facilities or when delivering joint programs

References / Related Documents:

Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, C. 14, Sched. 1

OLA's Position on Children's Rights in the Library

OLA's Position on Teens' Rights

Customer Code of Conduct