



<b>Policy Name</b>	Children and Teens in the Library		
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<b>Author</b>	Manager, Customer Service	<b>Next Review</b>	2029
<b>Policy Maintenance</b>	Reviewed by Management.		

## Policy Statement

The St. Catharines Public Library welcomes and encourages children and teens to enjoy the Library's programs, collections, services and spaces. Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children and teens using the library ultimately rests with the parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for library staff and volunteers working with children and teens, as well as to outline parent/guardian/caregiver responsibilities for the conduct and safety of their children and teens in the library.

## Scope

The St. Catharines Library recognizes that children and teens have a right to a respectful, supportive and safe environment when they visit the Library. Library staff are trained to assist children and teens in using the Library but cannot assume responsibility for the conduct, safety and well-being of children left unattended.

Library policies and services are designed to provide a safe and welcoming environment for customers of all ages but a parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver need to use the same caution with their children at the Library as they would in any other public setting.

## Definitions

**Child** is a person that is 11 and under.

**Parent** is the person or persons who have lawful custody of the child.

**Guardian** is a person who has lawful custody of a child, other than the parent of the child.

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

**Teen** is anyone 12 to 17 years old using the library.

## Regulations

The St. Catharines Public Library is guided by the terms of the Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017, S.O. 2017, c14, Schedule 1 with regard to the supervision of children. Specifically:

Section 136 (3) "No person having charge of a child less than 16 years of age shall leave the child without making provision for his or her supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances"

The Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act does not specify a minimum age for leaving a child unsupervised, it mandates that caregivers provide reasonable supervision and care for children under 16, with considerations based on the child's age, maturity, and the specific circumstances.

Children age 11 and under must be accompanied by a parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver at the St. Catharines Public Library.

The St. Catharines Public Library Board also endorses the Ontario Library Association's statements on Children's and Teens' Rights in the Public Library.

## Operational Guidelines

Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children and teens using the Library ultimately rests with the parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver.

### **Children and Teens in the Library**

The Library's Code of Conduct extends to all users of all ages.

Parents/Guardians/Caregivers are responsible for the conduct of their children and teens in the Library as outlined below:

- Teens age 12 and over and any child under their care may use the library independently on a regular basis but parents or guardians remain responsible for their behaviour while in the library.
- Children age 11 and under visiting the library or attending library programs/events must have a caregiver present in the library and be accessible to the child at all times. For some programs, caregivers are required to attend with their children. Library staff may request that a parent/guardian or caregiver be present to sign a child in and out of a program or remain with their child to provide active supervision throughout the program.
- If a child is left at the library at closing time or in the event of an emergency situation, the staff person in charge will attempt to contact the parents or caregivers. If the parent/guardian or adult caregivers cannot be contacted within 15 minutes of closing hour, staff will notify the police. Two staff will remain with the child until the parent and/or police arrive. Under no circumstances will library staff transport or take the child away from the library building.

### **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 is alone with younger children;
- A child is left alone and doing something dangerous or appears to be at risk;
- A child is alone and not following library behaviour expectations after reasonable reminders;
- A child is left alone at closing time;

### **Requests for Information Regarding Children or Teens**

As a public facility, the library does not monitor the activities of its customers of any age unless there is a problem with their conduct. If a child is noticed to be spending multiple days in the library during school hours, staff may check with the child and ask that a parent or guardian confirm with the library that they are aware of the child's whereabouts or contact Children's Aid Society for guidance if there are concerns about the child's well-being. Staff will not give information to any person over the telephone as to whether a child is currently in the library or has been in the library recently. Staff may offer to take a message and ask the child (if present in the library) to call the person back.

### **Requests for Information Regarding Missing Children/Runaways**

Staff will not give information to any person over the telephone as to whether a child or teen is currently in the library or has been in the library recently. Staff may offer to take a message and ask the child or teen to call the person back. In the case of a missing child/teen, Library staff connect with the library's Management Team to share information with the law enforcement agency requesting specific personal information.

### **Duty to Report**

Under the Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, there is a legal obligation for individuals to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Section 125 of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, states that any person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report their suspicion and the information upon which it is based, to a Children's Aid Society.

The duty to report applies to anyone who is, or appears to be, under the age of 16 years. Someone who is concerned that a 16- or 17-year-old is, or may be in need of protection, may make a report to a Children's Aid Society. When staff have reasonable grounds to suspect that someone is or may be in need of protection, they will advise Library management and together they will promptly report the suspicion, and the information upon which it is based, to a Children's Aid Society, as stated in the Ontario Child, Youth and Family Services Act, s.125(1).

### **Reference**

Policy G-07 Code of Conduct

Policy G-31 Privacy and Confidentiality of Customer Information