

Safety of Children in the Library Policy

Policy Level:	Library Board
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POLICY PURPOSE

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

KEY POINTS SUMMARY

Library employees are obligated by the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1](#) to call the Police or a Children's Aid Society if they have any concerns about the safety and well-being of a child.

Children under the age of 10 must be accompanied by an adult or caregiver while in the library.

Library employees 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.

Parents/guardians must ensure that children requiring supervision are brought to the library with a responsible caregiver.

Parents/guardians or caregivers are responsible for supervising their child's access to all library resources, including the Internet and Digital Media Lab technologies.

Children ages 10 and over are welcome to use the library independently on a regular basis, but parents/guardians are still responsible for the behaviour of any children while in the library.

DEFINITIONS

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

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

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

Children’s Aid Society (CAS) : In Hamilton, there are two Children’s Aid Society agencies: Hamilton Child and Family Supports (HCFS) and the Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton (CCAS). HCFS is formerly Hamilton Children’s Aid Society. For the purpose of this policy, the term “Children’s Aid Society” encompasses both agencies.

POLICY DETAILS

The Hamilton Public Library welcomes and encourages children of all ages to enjoy the library’s programs, collections, services and spaces. Library employees work to engage children, families and teens in positive ways, and provide support while they are in the library. All members are expected to abide by the library’s [Member and Service Commitment](#). Library employees and members share a commitment to maintain a pleasant, safe and respectful environment for learning and leisure.

The Hamilton Public Library Board endorses the Ontario Library Association’s statements on Children’s and Teens’ Rights in the Public Library. Library employees are trained to assist children in using the library but cannot assume responsibility for the safety and well-being of children left unattended in the building. Library policies and services are designed to provide a safe and welcoming environment for customers of all ages, but parents need to use the same caution with their children at the library as they would in any other public setting.

Responsibility for the welfare and the behaviour of children using the library ultimately rests with the parent/guardian or an assigned caregiver. The Hamilton Public Library recognizes the following terms as stipulated in the [Ontario Child and Family Services Act \(CFSA\)](#) regarding the supervision of children:

Section 79(4) “Where a person is charged with contravening Subsection (3) and the child is less than 10 years of age, the onus of establishing that the person made provision for the child’s supervision and care that was reasonable in the circumstances rests with the person.”

Library employees are obligated by the [Ontario Child and Family Services Act](#) to call the Police or the Children’s Aid Society if they have any concerns about the safety and well-being of a child.

General Guidelines

While in the library, children under the age of 10 must be accompanied by an adult or caregiver in the immediate vicinity. If a child is left at the library at closing time, or in the event of an emergency or closure, the library employee in charge will attempt to contact the parent/guardian or caregiver. If the parent/guardian or caregiver cannot be contacted within 10 minutes after closing, the library

employee will notify the police. Parents/guardians must ensure that children requiring supervision are brought to the library with a responsible caregiver. Parents or caregivers are responsible for supervising their child's access to all library resources including the Internet and Digital Media Lab technologies.

When children under the age of 10 participate in a library program, parents/guardians or caregivers are either required to attend with their child or remain on the premises and return to the programming area at the end of the program. Library employees may also request that a parent/guardian or caregiver be present to sign a child in and out of a program.

Children ages 10 and over are welcome to use the library independently on a regular basis, but parents/guardians are still responsible for the behaviour of any children while in the library.

Unattended Children in the Library

In most circumstances, the health and safety of children, particularly older children and teens, is not an issue. However, Library employees 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 asking for assistance.
- A child under the age of 12 is left alone with younger siblings.
- A child is alone and doing something dangerous or another person in the library seems to be a danger to the child.
- A child is alone and is not following library rules after reasonable warnings.
- A child is left alone at the library at closing time, during an unexpected closure or an emergency situation.

Requests for information regarding Truant Children

As a public facility, the library does not monitor the activities of its members unless there is a problem with conduct, or a child is inappropriately left alone as outlined above.

If a school-age child is noticed to be spending considerable time in the library during the school day, library employees may check with the child and connect with Children's Aid Society for guidance if there are concerns about a child's well-being or if the child discloses abuse.

Requests for Information regarding Children

Library employees 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. The library employee may offer to take a message and ask the child (if present in the library) to call the person back. In the case of a missing child or a child in danger the library employee will refer to their supervisor who will connect with the library's Senior Leadership Team to share information with the law enforcement agency requesting specific personal information.

Phone Numbers:

- **Hamilton Child and Family Supports (formerly Hamilton Children's Aid Society):** 905-522-1121 or 905-522-8053 (after hours)
- **Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton:** 905-525-2012 or 905-522-8053 (after hours)
- **Hamilton Police Service:** 905-546-4925 (non-emergency line)
- **Kids Help Phone:** 1-800-668-6868

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Relevant Legislation:

- Child and Family Services Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11:
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90c11#BK135>
- Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1:
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14#BK176>

Related Resources:

- Hamilton Child and Family Supports – What Happens When a Report is Made:
<https://hamiltoncfs.ca/protecting-children/when-you-call/>
- Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton – Reporting Abuse:
<https://hccas.ca/reporting-abuse/>
- Ministry of Children's Services – Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Brochure:
<https://files.ontario.ca/pdf-3/mccss-report-child-abuse-and-neglect-en-2022-03-31.pdf>
- Hamilton Child and Family Supports – Recognizing Maltreatment:
<https://hamiltoncfs.ca/protecting-children/recognizing-maltreatment/>

APPROVAL HISTORY

Replaced the Unattended Children Policy – June 1995; April 2001; September 2015; April 2021; April 2025