

CHILDREN & THE LIBRARY

PURPOSE

West Perth Public Library recognizes that the needs of young people are important in their own right. Their intellectual growth, cultural appreciation and recreational activities should be fostered through quality library service, delivered with consideration and respect. This policy sets out the library resources offered to children, as well as to caregivers and adults who work with children. This policy also sets out the responsibilities for the safety of children participating in library activities.

West Perth Public Library endeavours to provide these resources based on the principles stated in the Ontario Library Association's *Children's Rights in the Public Library, 1998*.

RESOURCES

Collections

1. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or designate will ensure the maintenance and organization of a comprehensive collection of materials for and about children, based on the Library's *Collections* policy.
2. The children's collections will reflect the changing educational needs and personal interests of children and teens, as well as trends in society.
3. The library staff will develop the collections to include:
 - a. Canadian authors and content;
 - b. award-winning titles;
 - c. non-fiction materials that complement the local school curriculum;
 - d. age-appropriate formats.

Reference and Readers Advisory

1. Library staff will utilize the full range of collections, technologies and other resources to answer users' requests for information, regardless of age and

without judgment, with confidentiality and respect.

2. Library staff will ask reference questions to understand better what each child wants and needs.
3. Library staff will point out the variety of resources available in all areas of the Library, as appropriate.

Programs

1. The Library will provide programs and activities for children and caregivers, both in and out of the Library, to stimulate creative potential and to encourage and facilitate the habit of reading, independent learning and use of library resources.
2. The Library will provide educational and entertaining literacy-related programs and activities, and support for children, such as:
 - a. programs for caregivers that will educate them on the importance of early literacy, the role of the Library in their children's lives, and supports the Library can offer them;
 - b. programs for classes, children's groups, daycares, etc., depending on age, that emphasize early literacy and Library orientation, and that encourage reading for leisure, or highlight various aspects of the collection.
3. The number of participants for all programs and events will be restricted based on size of the facility, fire department limits, staff supervision available, etc. This will be enforced by the library staff member in charge.
4. Some programs or events may limit the age of children and the number of children per accompanying adult. This limit is enforceable by library staff members, as it helps to ensure maximum benefit to the participants through personal interaction.

LIBRARY SPACE

1. The Library will provide a specified area for children that is distinct from the adult area, with signage that is clear and age-appropriate.
2. Children's areas will have furniture, shelves and equipment designed for, and accessible to, children of different ages and abilities.
3. Children's areas are interactive learning spaces where controlled noise levels are accepted and where young users are invited to explore library resources in their own way.

STAFFING

1. The Library Board supports ongoing staff training and professional development in children's services.
2. The CEO will ensure that all staff members assigned to children's resources receive appropriate training to provide knowledgeable library service.
3. Library staff will advocate for children's resources in the community by:
 - a. collaborating with agencies to promote early literacy, love of reading, life-long learning and children's well-being;
 - b. seeking support for children's resources from community organizations through fundraising, donations and partnerships;
 - c. communicating with local school staff;
 - d. promoting the Library's children's resources to groups who could benefit from them.
4. While library staff will assist young people with finding materials, using the Internet or participating in activities, caregivers are responsible for their children and their use of library resources at all times.

CHILDREN'S SAFETY

West Perth Public Library staff recognize that children of all ages have a right to a welcoming, respectful, supportive and safe environment. As the Library is a busy, public place, library staff cannot assume responsibility for any child left unattended within our public facility, or at off-site programs or events.

Responsibilities of the Parent or Caregiver

1. Responsibility for the welfare and behaviour of children rests entirely with their caregiver(s).
2. The Library is guided by the terms in the Ontario *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA) with regards to unattended children:
 - Section 136 (3) "*Leaving child unattended* (3) No person having charge of a child younger than 16 shall leave the child without making provision for the child's supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances."ⁱ

This legislation does not specify an age at which a child can be left alone. Rather, the legislation seeks to protect young people from any type of abuse or neglect, and requires that all caregivers make reasonable plans (which will vary according to a child's age, maturity and circumstances) for the supervision of young people under sixteen (16) years old in their care.

3. To this end, the Library expects caregivers:
 - a. not to leave children under sixteen (16) years old requiring supervision to be unattended on the library premises, or at off-site venues;
 - b. to monitor the use of resources by children in their care;
 - c. to take responsibility for the appropriate behaviour of children in their care.

4. In this Library:
 - a. Children ages twelve (12) years old and older are welcome to use the Library independently on a regular basis, but caregivers are still responsible for the behavior of any children up to the age of sixteen (16) years old while they are in the Library or at off-site venues;
 - b. Children younger than twelve (12) years old must be accompanied by a caregiver while in the Library or at off-site events. During scheduled programs, caregivers must remain in the library building, or in the immediate vicinity at off-site venues.

Responsibility of Staff

1. The Library staff members will be guided by this policy in situations where:
 - a. an unattended child is found frightened or crying in the Library;
 - b. an unattended child is perceived to be endangering themselves or others;
 - c. another person in the Library poses a perceived threat to the unattended child;
 - d. an unattended child exhibits specifically inappropriate behaviour;
 - e. an unattended child is not met by a responsible caregiver at closing time;
 - f. a child is consistently left on their own in the Library for long periods of time.

2. Where a responsible adult cannot be contacted, Library staff will:
 - a. not leave a child unattended at closing time;
 - b. not give the child a ride home;
 - c. contact local police and/or the Children's Aid Society (CAS);
 - d. remain with the child until the proper authorities take the child into their protection.

Duty to Report

1. The *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (Section 125) recognizes that all adults have a responsibility for the welfare of children. It clearly states that members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have a *legislated* obligation to report promptly to the Children's Aid Society (CAS) if they suspect that a child or youth under the age of sixteen (16) years old is, or may be, in need of protection. The CYFSA defines the phrase "child in need of protection" as physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and at risk of harm.

2. Library staff who are concerned that a sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) year old is, or may be, in need of protection *may* make a report to Children's Aid Society (CAS) and the CAS is required to assess the reported information.
3. When library staff members have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is, or may be, in need of protection, they will advise the Library CEO to report promptly the suspicion, and information upon which it is based, to the local CAS, as required in CYFSA s.136 (1).

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION POSITION ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Children in public libraries have the right to:

1. Intellectual freedom
2. Equal access to the full range of services and materials available to other users.
3. A full range of materials, services and programs specifically designed and developed to meet their needs.
4. Adequate funding for collections and services related to population, use and local community needs.
5. A library environment that complements their physical and developmental stages.
6. Trained and knowledgeable staff specializing in children's services.
7. Welcoming, respectful, supportive service from birth through the transition to adult user.
8. An advocate who will speak on their behalf to the Library administration, Library Board, Municipal Council and community to make people aware of the goals of children's services.
9. Library policies written to include the needs of the child.

PHONE NUMBERS

Huron-Perth Children's Aid Society: 1-800-668-5094

Ontario Provincial Police Perth Detachment – Mitchell Office: 519-348-9700 or 1-888-310-1122 (non-emergency lines)

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

West Perth Public Library Policy. *Collections*.

West Perth Public Library Policy. *Programming and Community Partnerships*.

Ontario Library Association. [Children's Rights in the Public Library](#) statement, 1998.

Ontario Library Association. [Teens Rights in the Public Library](#) statement, 2010.

Government of Ontario. *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990*.

Government of Ontario. *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

POLICY TYPE: Operational

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On April 30, 2018, the new *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA) came into force, and brought changes to various age requirements.

Section 79 of the old Child and Family Services Act – contained two clauses about leaving a child unattended – specifically that “(3) *No person having charge of a child less than sixteen years of age shall leave the child without making provision for his or her supervision and care that is reasonable in the circumstances*” as well as a “reverse onus” clause which stated that “(4) *Where a person is charged with contravening subsection (3) and the child is less than ten 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*”. The similar sections of the new CYFSA legislation, at Section 136, has removed the “reverse onus” clause and does not specify an age where a child can be left alone. The CYFSA contains many references to children younger than twelve (12) years old, including Section 84 in regard to “*bringing child younger than 12 home or to place of safety*”. For this reason, the age of twelve (12) years old and older was selected as the age for children in West Perth Public Library to be left alone.

A second key change under the CYFSA is to raise the “*age of protection from 16 to 18.*” With this change, the Ministry of Children & Youth Services factsheet (posted at <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/professionals/childwelfare/fact-sheet-youth-agencies.aspx>) notes that “*The legislated duty to report will continue to apply in respect of children under 16.*” But that for sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) there is a voluntary reporting provision (Section 125), specifically that, “*a professional or member of the public who is concerned that a 16-or 17-year old is or may be in need of protection may make a report to a society and the society is required to assess the reported information*”. Information on how to report to the local Children’s Aid society or, in the case of a First Nations, Inuk or Métis child, a society or a child and family service authority is outlined in brochures posted at <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/childrensaidd/reportingabuse/index.aspx>