

## Children and Young Adults Policy Regional Library

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# Clarence Regional Library

## 1 Definitions

- Child: clients aged 0 – 12 years. This is in line with the Department of Local Government definition of children as aged 0 – 12 years for social planning purposes.
- Young adult: clients aged 13 years up to and including 18 years. It is acknowledged that the Department of Local Government defines Youth more broadly as 12-24 years for social planning purposes.
- Unattended child: A child using public library resources and facilities unsupervised by a parent or carer.

## 2 Policy Statement

Clarence Regional Library is committed to serving the information and recreation needs of young people. The Library strives to provide a welcoming environment, and provides targeted resources and programs to meet the needs of young people.

## 3 Service statement

Public libraries are agencies that provide the public (including young people) with access to information and recreational materials through a variety of services and resources. Libraries also support young people through the provisions of programs that foster and appreciation of literature and promote the development of information literacy skills.

The Clarence Regional Library's services to young people include:

- Fiction and non-fiction (study and recreational books)
- Magazines
- Non- Print resources, eg: CD-Roms, DVD's, online databases
- Internet access
- Assistance from staff in accessing collections and information
- Public access computers, including Internet access
- Pre-school storytime
- Space for activities and study.

## 4 Parental responsibility statement

### 4.1 Access to resources

Library collections are available to all library users without restriction, except for items restricted by law. The Library exercises no limitation on access to publications classified *Unrestricted* under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*. The Library has no censorship role in its choice of the library resources that form the collection.

It is not the responsibility of the Clarence Regional Library or its staff to exercise a supervisory or restrictive role in determining which library resources young people may use or access. The Library encourages parents/carers to set their own family rules in consultation with their child. It is the responsibility of parents/carers to monitor young people's selection and use of library resources.

## 4.2 Items classified MA or R

Public libraries observe the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995 [NSW]* which provides for certain restrictions when making materials available to minors. Resources classified **MA** or **R** may only be borrowed or viewed by persons under 15 with the permission of their parent/guardian.

## 4.3 Access to electronic resources

4.3.1 Library staff are available to assist clients in the use of the Internet, and to recommend websites on particular subjects. A number of appropriate websites have been selected for inclusion in the Library's electronic collections and paper guides.

4.3.2 Parents/carers are responsible for their child's use of the Internet, in line with the Library's Internet policy. (Please refer to *Parents Guide to the Internet*). The Library does not monitor or control the content of materials offered through the Internet. Parents may indicate that they do not wish their child to use the Internet in the library by ticking **No** to the statement: **I agree to be responsible for this child's use of the Internet in the library** when authorising a child's membership to the library. The child will then be issued with a red library card, as opposed to the usual blue, which will indicate that the child is not permitted to use the Internet in the library. If parents wish to vary this condition, they may apply for a new card indicating that the child may use the Internet in the library.

4.3.3 Some exceptions to the parent/carer consent may be made for minors who are living independently.

## 4.4 Unattended children

4.4.1 Staff take care to ensure that the library is a safe and welcoming place for all patrons. Responsibility for a child's use of the library, however, lies with the parent/carer at all times. Libraries do not have the facilities or appropriate licences to attend to children who are left unsupervised. Young children left alone in a library can become distressed, bored or disruptive. Library users, including young people, who disturb other library users, may be removed from the library under the *Library Act 1939*.

4.4.2 Unsupervised children can be at risk in any public place, including public libraries. Library staff do not supervise children in the library, so there is a risk that unattended children may leave the library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers. Libraries are busy public places, open to all, and staff cannot judge which members of the public present a possible danger to children. In addition, libraries do not have the facilities to attend to children who are sick, injured or hungry.

4.4.3 A child left unattended in a public library may be classed as a child or young person at risk of harm under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, s23, and subsequently may be reported as such to the Department of Community Services under s24 or s27 of the Act.

4.4.4 There is no law that specifies a minimum age at which children may be left unattended in public. The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection)*

*Act 1998* is concerned with individual circumstances rather than age. For example, a 7 year old child who uses the library constructively on his own for an hour every day after school while waiting for a parent is unlikely to be considered a problem, and is indeed a welcome client. On the other hand, a 10 year old child who is left at the library every day of the summer holidays from opening time until closing time is at risk and presents an unreasonable burden for the public library.

- 4.4.5 Parents who leave a child unattended in a public library are exposing their child to potential harm, and may themselves be committing an offence under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, s228.

## **5 Procedure:**

- 5.1 If a child is left unattended in the library for a long period of time, parents/carers will be contacted and informed of library policy.
- 5.2 If the parents/carers ignore this policy or are unable to be contacted, the situation may be reported to the Department of Community Services if library staff determine the child is at risk of harm.
- 5.3 If a child is left unattended at closing time staff should call the police.