

Big Sky Libraries

Children's Policy



Adopted [xx] 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

Big Sky Libraries (**Library Service**) is committed to providing young people with opportunities to satisfy both their recreation and information needs in safe and welcoming environments. Staffs in the Branch Libraries appreciate the importance of children as a core group of users and as such, strive to provide resources and programs that stimulate and engage young people within their communities.

The Library Service's Children's Policy formalises the general principles under which Branch Libraries operate in regard to the provision of services to children as well as outlining the responsibilities of parents/legal guardians and staff in regard to children within Branch Library settings.

The Library Service is part of the strong NSW Public Library Network that includes 363 service points across the state. The State Library of NSW plays a pivotal role through provision of consultancy and support services to public libraries, as well as administering the distribution of state government library funding to NSW Councils. As such, the Library Service accepts and promotes the Policy Guidelines facilitated by the State Library NSW.

1.1 Policy Objectives

The Library Service's Children's Policy determines guidelines for all stakeholders, including staff and the public, in relation to the presence of children within Branch Libraries. Guidelines include parental responsibilities, child safe and child-friendly principles and mandatory reporting of 'at risk' children.

1.2 Scope of Policy

This policy applies at all Branch Libraries of the Library Service.

1.3 Definitions

Branch Libraries include the libraries of the Member Councils including Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Moree Community Library, Mungindi and Walgett and each of them is a **Branch Library**.

child-safe means taking steps to keep children safe from physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

child-friendly means children are valued, respected and included so they feel confident they will be listened to.

Deed of Agreement means the agreement forming the Library Service.

Library Service means Big Sky Libraries.

Member Councils are councils that are signatories to the Deed of Agreement.

In the context of the Library Service's Children's Policy a **minor** is deemed a child at the age of 10 or under.

Mandatory Reporting occurs where a person who in their paid work is obliged by law to report specific forms of child abuse or neglect to Department of Community Services NSW where that person reasonably suspects that abuse has occurred. (Mandatory reporting requirements vary across Australia. In the case of New South Wales, a person who is in paid work in a career which delivers health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement, wholly or partly, to children is required to report suspected cases of harm or neglect to the Department of Community Services.)

Policy Guidelines means the Library Council of NSW's Children's Policy Guidelines for NSW Public Libraries (revised July 2008).

Regional Library Managers' Group means the group comprising the manager of each Branch Library (or their nominee), the Library Service's Cooperative Library Manager and any other appropriate nominee of a Member Council which may include a councillor(s), the General Manager and the Director of Corporate Services of that Member Council.

1.4 Legislative Context

The Library Service operates under the *Library Act 1939* and the NSW Library Regulation 2010, with *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* being related legislation.

1.5 Related Documents

The State Library NSW provides guidance to NSW public libraries in relation to best practice guidelines for children, parents and public libraries. The Library Service's Children's Policy has been developed from these Guidelines.

Cybersmart is a Federal Government initiative administered by the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA). The aim of the web based program is to provide relevant and up-to-date information to promote online safety aimed at both children and parents/guardians.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2.1 Service Statement

The Library Service's collections, programs and services to young people may include:

- 2.1.1 fiction, non-fiction and recreational books;
- 2.1.2 magazines;
- 2.1.3 computer games for use within a branch library;

- 2.1.4 DVDs;
- 2.1.5 computer and internet access;
- 2.1.6 assistance from specialist and general staff in accessing collections;
- 2.1.7 homework help;
- 2.1.8 internet training;
- 2.1.9 storytime and baby bounce programs;
- 2.1.10 space for activities or study.

NB Storytime, Baby Bounce, space for activities and study, computer games for in- house use, computer and internet access are subject to availability at each Branch Library.

2.2 Access to Resources

- 2.2.1 The Library Service's general collection may contain publications that have been classified "Unrestricted" and films and computer games that have been classified "G" (General), "PG" (Parental Guidance) or "M" (Mature) in accordance with the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth). This material is available to all persons, including young persons, without restriction.
- 2.2.2 The Library Service advises parents/legal guardians of young children to use their own judgement in monitoring and supervising what their child is accessing or borrowing from the library and reminds parents/legal guardians that responsibility for access to items as above remains with the parent/legal guardian.

The Library promotes and supports young people's access to information, including electronic information through its Internet facilities. Library staff are available to assist young people in the use of the Internet, and to recommend websites on particular subjects.

Parents/guardians are responsible for their child's use of the Internet, in line with the Library's Internet policy

2.3 Unattended Children

- 2.3.1 NSW Legislation does not state an age at which a child can be left unattended within a public place. The Policy Guidelines state that the age at which children are able to be left unattended in libraries varies and is the decision of the individual library or library service as to what age minimum is set. In the case of the Library Service, children left unattended at a Branch Library are considered "at risk" if left

unattended and are aged 10 years or younger.

- 2.3.2 Unsupervised children within a library can cause disturbances to other users and are also at risk of harm to themselves or others. Staff of the Branch Libraries reserve the right to ask any user to leave the library if their behaviour is affecting other library patrons or staff; is dangerous to themselves or others within the library; or if their behaviour is destructive to collections and other resources held within the library. For more information regarding exclusion from Branch Libraries please read the Library Service's Customer Exclusion Policy.

2.4 Internet Use

- 2.4.1 Branch Libraries do not use censorship software products to limit internet content. Parents are advised that Branch Libraries do not take any responsibility for the material viewed via the internet and caution parents/legal guardians to supervise and advise their children on appropriate use of its applications. Parents/guardians are required to provide authorisation upon uptake of a Library Service membership for a minor in their care. The signed authorisation provides library staff with information regarding the parent's/guardian's wishes in relation to the use of the internet by the minor whilst in Branch Libraries.

2.5 Child Protection

- 2.5.1 The Library Service supports the child-safe and child-friendly policies and practices of the NSW Commission for Children and Young People.

2.6 Mandatory reporting

- 2.6.1 Under section 24 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, any person can report harm or risk of a child or young person aged under 16.
- 2.6.2 Public library staff are not generally required to be mandatory reporters of suspected cases of neglect or harm of children. There is however, a legal requirement for those who are employed in selected occupations to report suspected cases of neglect or harm (in NSW) to the Department of Community Services. These occupations include those which deliver: health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement, wholly or partly, to children.
- 2.6.3 Library staff who participate in providing services to children are required by law to report incidents where they reasonably suspect, during the course of their work, that a child is at risk of harm.

2.7 Child-related employment

2.7.1 The Member Councils are required under NSW legislation (*Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*) to undertake Working with Children checks for employees who are entering into child-related employment.

2.7.2 Working in a library is not classified as child-related employment with the exception of some library roles in which there is direct unsupervised contact with children as may be the case for a children's librarian etc.

2.8 Adherence to Policy

2.8.1 All staff of the Library Service, including headquarters' and Branch Library staff, are responsible for implementing this policy consistently across the Branch Libraries.

2.8.2 Customers of the Branch Libraries and Library Service staff, including headquarters' and Branch Library staff, are responsible for abiding by the intent of this policy. The Library Service's Customer Lending Policy will be available to the public via the Library Service's website.

3. REVIEW AND AMENDMENT

3.1 This policy shall remain in effect until revised and adopted by the Regional Library Managers' Group.

3.2 This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993* and, in any event, annually.

3.3 Interpretation of this Policy in relation to operational matters may be made with through the Library Service's Cooperative Library Manager.