

Shoalhaven Libraries – Children’s Policy

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Directorate:	City Lifestyles
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1. Purpose

The Policy provides children, young people, and their parents / guardians / carers with a clear understanding of the role of the Library and the scope of its services as they apply to children and young people.

2. Statement

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with Council's Code of Conduct, Shoalhaven Libraries Operations Policy (POL22/61), Shoalhaven Libraries Internet Usage Policy (POL22/60), and amendments made therein.

3. Provisions

Shoalhaven Libraries is committed to serving the information and recreational needs of children and young people. The Library aims to provide a welcoming environment, and targeted resources and programs to meet the needs of children and young people.

1.1. Professional Values

Public Library services to children and young people are underpinned by the following professional values:

1.1.1. The Australian Library & Information Association (ALIA) Statement on Free Access to Information (2018) states that *"freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have access to information and ideas"*.

This statement also addresses censorship. Libraries should resist *"attempts by individuals or groups within their communities to restrict access to information and ideas"*. Collection material should not be rejected on the grounds that its content is controversial or likely to offend some sections of the Library's community.

1.1.2. A publication that has not been subjected to legal restriction or prohibition will not be excluded from the collection on moral, political, racist, or religious grounds alone whatever the pressure that may be brought to bear by individuals or groups.

1.1.3. The ALIA Professional Conduct Policy Statement (2018) states that people engaged in library and information services are members of a profession committed to act with integrity, ethics, trust, expertise, and the promotion of public good.

1.1.4. The Library Council of NSW Guideline (2019) 'Access to Information in New South Wales Public Libraries', states that public libraries have *"a role as an unbiased source of information and ideas, including online content. It must accept responsibility for providing free access to materials and information presenting, as far as possible, all points of view on current and historical issues, including controversial issues"*.

1.1.5. The Library Council of NSW 'Children's Policy Guidelines for NSW Public Libraries' (2020) states that public libraries *"support young people through the provision of collections and programs that foster an appreciation of literature and promote the development of information literacy skills"*.

1.1.6. Public Libraries acknowledge the democratic rights of individuals to freely pursue their own information interests. This view is articulated in the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Public Library Manifesto (1994) which states that *"constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on*

satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information”.

1.1.7. The NSW Office of Children and Young People suggests that relevant articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are noted by public libraries, including:

- Article 13: Outlines the child's right to freedom of expression; to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.
- Article 29: Outlines that children have the right to develop personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
- Article 31: Recognises the right of children to leisure, play and recreational activities and the freedom to participate in cultural and artistic life.

1.2. Service Statement – Services to Children and Young People

Shoalhaven Libraries services to children and young people include:

- fiction and nonfiction collections in a range of formats
- early literacy programs (for example Storytime and related activities)
- access to the internet
- information services such as reference assistance and homework help
- public space
- events and performances
- games

1.3. Parent / Carer Responsibility Statement

1.3.1. Access to resources

The role of Shoalhaven Library staff is to guide and assist children and young people in finding and accessing resources appropriate to particular interests and inquiries.

The catalogue of the South Coast Cooperative Library Service is available through the Internet, allowing users to access the collections of the Libraries that make up the South Coast Cooperative Library Service. Various member services are also available through the WebOpac at <https://shoalhaven.libero.com.au/libero/WebOpac.cls>.

Shoalhaven Libraries' general collection may contain publications that have been classified 'Unrestricted' and films classified 'G' (General), 'PG' (Parental Guidance) or 'M' (Mature) in accordance with the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games Act 1995). This material is available to all persons, including children and young people, without restriction.

Shoalhaven Libraries' also offers access to films via DVD and streaming services, which may include films that have been classified 'MA' and 'R'. Members under the age of 18 are not permitted to access films with an 'R' rating, and members under the age of 15 should only access films rated 'MA' with the consent of their parent or guardian.

Parents / guardians / carers are responsible for ensuring that their child's selection and use of materials in the Library's general collection accords with any restrictions the family may wish to set.

Shoalhaven Libraries encourages parents / guardians / carers to consult with their child to develop clear rules regarding access to resources that accord with the family's personal values and beliefs.

The Library promotes and supports children's and young persons' access to information, including electronic information through its Internet facilities.

Library staff are available to assist children and young people in the use of the Internet, and to recommend websites on particular subjects.

Parents / guardians / carers are responsible for their child's use of the Internet. All users of the Internet, including children and young people are not permitted to access illegal sites.

Please refer to Shoalhaven Libraries Internet Usage Policy (POL22/60) for more information about Internet responsibilities.

1.3.2. Unattended Children

Application: in this Policy, a child is defined as a person under twelve (12) years of age.

Unsupervised children can be at risk in any public place, including public libraries. Shoalhaven Libraries staff do not supervise children in the Library, and there is a risk that unattended children may leave the Library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers. In addition, apart from emergency First Aid, the Library does not have the facilities or appropriate licenses to attend to children who are sick, injured, or hungry.

Children left unattended in the Library may be classed as a child or young person at risk to harm under Section 23 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, 1998 and may be reported as such to the Director-General of the Department of Community Services. Parents / guardians / carers who leave a child unattended in the Library are exposing their child to potential harm and may be committing an offence under Section 228 of the same Act.

Young children left alone in a library can become distressed, bored, or disruptive. Young people who disturb other library users may be removed from the Library under Clause 17 of the Library Regulation 2010 under the Library Act, 1939.

Library staff, in the event of any child left unattended in a public library at the time of library closure, will:

- Notify Council's Call Centre which will log the call, then contact the Police and/or Council's Ranger Service or Security Service, provided that all attempts to notify the parent / guardian / carer have been made prior to notifying the authorities named above.
- Two (2) staff members will remain with any unattended child until the arrival of the parent / guardian / carer, or the authorities named above.

1.4. Child safe, child friendly principles

- 1.4.1. Child-safe means taking steps to keep children safe from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- 1.4.2. Child-friendly means children are valued, respected and included so that they feel confident that they will be listened to.
- 1.4.3. Council ensures that the Library is safe for children from a Work Health Safety point of view and that it takes reasonable care to ensure that the Library is safe and welcoming for all Library users. Responsibility for a child's use of the Library lies with the parents / guardians / carers at all times.
- 1.4.4. Shoalhaven Libraries value eSafety and lifelong learning and are committed to helping children and parents stay safe online. We are currently working towards being eSmart accredited. eSmart is a cyber safety framework designed to fully equip libraries, staff, and library users with the skills they need for smart, safe, and responsible use of digital technology.

3.5. Mandatory reporting

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.

General Library staff are not legally required to report incidents, however, there is a legal requirement under Section 27 of the same Act for any person who participates in providing children's services to report incidents where they reasonably suspect, during the course of their work, that a child is at risk of significant harm.

Australian Institute of Family Studies: 'Mandatory reporting of child abuse' (2020) at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect> provides more information relating to requirements of mandatory reporting in NSW.

4. Implementation

The City Lifestyles Directorate will administer this Policy.

5. Review

To be reviewed within one year of the election of a new Council.