# Unattended Children Policy

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**BACKGROUND**

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) welcomes children of all ages and their carers to use our library spaces and facilities and to enjoy our programs and events. GRLC has a duty of care to all library users and staff to ensure their safety, comfort and wellbeing and that no one is placed in a situation where they are at risk. This policy details the responsibilities of staff; if and when unattended children are deemed to be at risk in any of the GRLC libraries or at a GRLC event or outreach program.
DEFINITIONS

Child: a person under the age of 16 years, as per the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

Parent / Carer: the legal guardian of the child or a responsible person over the age of 16 years who has been delegated responsibility for the child by its parent or legal guardian

Duty of care: a duty to take reasonable care of a person

Unattended Child: a child under the age of 12, unaccompanied by a parent / carer

Risk: the possibility of something happening that impacts on safety and service delivery, measured in terms of likelihood and consequence

Vulnerable: an unattended child whose safety and wellbeing may be endangered if he/she is sent out of the building unattended

SCOPE

The Branch Team Leader or most senior staff member present has the authority to decide if a child is unattended. Factors that inform decision making include the time of day and if it is dark outside.

POLICY

A responsible parent / carer should accompany children whilst they are using library services. Parents / carers are responsible for a child’s welfare as well as monitoring and regulating their behaviour. Staff will therefore seek out parents / carers when:

- an unattended child is found frightened or crying in the library
- an unattended child is perceived to be endangering themselves or another
- an unattended child exhibits inappropriate behaviour
- an unattended child has not been met by a responsible parent / carer at closing time

If a parent / carer is not located within the library or at the event / outreach program:

- they will be contacted by phone and asked to pick up the child within an agreed time
- they will be informed that if they do not arrive within the agreed time that the police will be called
- they will given a copy of this policy upon their arrival to pick up the child
- an incident form will be completed by the senior staff member

If the parent / carer does not arrive to pick up the child:

- the police will be called and requested to come to pick up the child – the estimated time of their arrival will be noted
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- the senior staff member and one other staff member will wait with the child on library premises or at the event / outreach program until they are collected by a parent or carer
- staff will not, under any circumstances drive the child to any location

If there are repeated incidents of the same child being left unattended:

- the parent / carer will be given a copy of this policy when they collect the child and informed by the Branch Team Leader that the police may be called if this happens again

If there are repeated incidents of the same child being left unattended and being collected by the police:

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SCOPE

The Branch Team Leader or most senior staff member present has the authority to decide if a child is unattended. Children develop and mature at different rates and so whilst 12 years and under is determined as a child that should be supervised by a parent or carer, discretion and judgment will apply when deciding if a child is vulnerable and at risk - or old enough to be alone in the library and/ or sent out of the building. Examples of factors that inform decision making include the time of day and if it is dark outside.

POLICY

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