

# TIPS AND TALKING POINTS

## For Dealing with a Concern or Complaint about Library Materials

*Every situation is different, but you can be ready to respond if someone has a question, concern, or complaint about a book or other resources in the library . Remember, any library patron has the right to express concerns about library resources and expect to have the objection taken seriously.*

### In advance of the encounter

- Follow NPL's current policies and procedures for materials selection and maintenance.
- Be familiar with the steps to follow in case of a concern or challenge.

### At the time of the encounter (for more detail, see reverse side)

- Breathe and try to relax.
- Listen openly,
- Thank the person for bringing the concern to you.
- If this is beyond your scope of responsibility, ask for the patron's information and inform them that a supervisor will follow up with them.
- Indicate the next steps if this initial conversation does not resolve the concern or question.
- Be clear on the follow-up, if any, that you will take.
- Smile and say thank you (again).

### After an encounter

- Document what happened.
- Inform your supervisor.
- Supervisors: document the incident and send an email to Noel Rutherford with the title in question and the concern.

*Customers who wish to request the withdrawal or reclassification of materials currently owned by the Library are encouraged to discuss their concerns with a Manager. If the customer is not satisfied with the response of the Manager to their request, the Manager will give the customer a Request for Reconsideration packet that includes:*

- NPL's Collection Development Policy
- The Library Bill of Rights
- The "Freedom to Read" statement of the American Library Association
- Business Card for the Head of Collection Development
- Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Form

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- Don't agree or argue or apologize.
- Affirm the value of the individual's interest and involvement as a concerned parent/caregiver/community member. (e.g. "Thank you for coming to me with your concern. We wish everyone were as involved with what their children are reading/what we have on our shelves.")
- Think of this conversation as an opportunity to talk about the library with an engaged member of your community.
- Don't try to defend the material in question. Instead, address the broader goals of the collection:
  - ◇ I understand that this is offensive to you. The library supports intellectual freedom. According to the American Library Association, intellectual freedom is the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment.
  - ◇ Acknowledge that you never assume every book is for every child or family.
  - ◇ Emphasize the library is a place of choice, and the goal is to make sure everyone will be able to find many things to meet their needs and interests.
  - ◇ Assure them there are many books/materials they will enjoy.
  - ◇ Affirm the rights of parents/guardians to decide what they are comfortable having their own children read.
- Don't automatically hand the person a Request for Reconsideration form. If the individual still wants to pursue the issue after your conversation, inform them of what they need to do. Then provide them with the form, or indicate how you will do so.
- Remember that this individual is probably not on a mission to ban books. This person is probably an adult who was not prepared to see the content that surprised or shocked them or is not prepared to talk about it with a child. Such encounters are typically less about the desire to prohibit as the desire to protect, and less about what children and teens may be ready for as what the adults in their lives may be ready for. These are points for understanding, not judgment. It doesn't change the fact that one individual cannot dictate what all children, teens and families can access, but it is a way to remember that this is an opportunity to converse and listen, not lecture.
- At any point, if this is beyond your scope of responsibility, ask for the patron's information and inform them that your supervisor will follow up with them.