

Intellectual Freedom Toolkit

OKLAHOMA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SUPPORT OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM:

As the freedom to read is a natural outgrowth of the constitutional right of freedom of the press, it is an essential element of a democratic society. The right of all citizens to utilize whatever information they choose in the formation of opinions requires that freedom of access to information must be preserved.

It is the responsibility of libraries and librarians to provide access to information and to guard against attempts to abrogate this freedom. The Oklahoma Library Association pledges to resist all such attempts and to provide assistance and support to libraries and librarians engaged in resisting such attempts.

In view of these facts, this toolkit has been developed by the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Oklahoma Library Association. The Association subscribes to the principles set forth by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution and statements of Intellectual Freedom issues from the American Library Association (ALA) and Oklahoma Statutes on library patron privacy including:

- [ALA Library Bill of Rights](#)
- [ALA Freedom to Read Statement](#)
- [ALA Freedom to View Statement](#)
- [ALA Code of Ethics](#)
- [ALA Policy on Confidentiality of Library Records](#)
- [OKLAHOMA STATUTE §65-1-105 Disclosure of Records](#)
- [FCC Children's Internet Protection Act](#)
- [Libraries: An American Value](#)

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO LIBRARY STAFF FROM OLA/IFC

Various forms of assistance are available from the Intellectual Freedom Committee to library staff members who are facing a censorship challenge.

- I. I. Private
 - A. Consultation on possible procedures, advice, moral support
 - B. Research—book reviews, sample policies, examples of tactics, statements from other groups
 - C. Addresses—American Library Association IFC; Freedom to Read Foundation
- II. II. Public
 - A. The Executive Board will execute all public actions on behalf of OLA, taking into consideration information and recommendations received from the Intellectual Freedom Committee.

WHAT TO DO WHEN MATERIALS ARE CHALLENGED:

- Listen calmly and politely to the challenge. Treat the individual or group challenging the material with dignity. Do not argue or agree!
- If a person within the library has been designated to deal with challenges, refer the challenger to that person.
- Provide a request for reconsideration form. Provide copies of any statements and/or policies that the library's policies and procedures dictate.
- Notify supervisor and/or the library administration when a request for reconsideration is received.
- Know who has been designated by the library to respond to press and/or public queries about challenged materials. Refer all such queries to that person. If no person has been designated, designate one now.
- Follow library policies and procedures for the review of materials.
- When the review of materials is complete, respond in writing to the individual or group requesting the review. Explain the review procedure and final decision. A person should be designated to make all such responses.
- If confidentiality is an issue, cite [OKLAHOMA STATUTE §65-1-105 Disclosure of Records](#). Do not reveal any patron's name or circulation record to anyone other than that patron unless the person is authorized to receive the information (for example, a parent or guardian may be authorized to see a child's record). If a court order is produced, refer it to administration or the library's legal counsel.
- Reach out to the OLA Intellectual Freedom and Ethics Committee for additional support or guidance through resources in this toolkit or additional support.
- Concentrate on the positive role of the library, not the negative aspects of the challenge. Do not engage in verbal or press battles over materials.
- Keep challenged materials on the shelf during the reconsideration process.
- Report challenges to ALA's OIF by using the [Challenge Reporting Form](#).

SCRIPTING: KEY IDEAS AND EXAMPLES

Intellectual Freedom Committee, OLA Conference 2002: "Harry, Huck, and H____"
Karen Bays, Metropolitan Library System

Please use scripting examples as suggestions of possible responses that you can adapt to fit your own personal style and library setting. Here are the five "A's" of responding to materials challenges with respect, grace, and confidence:

1. ACTIVELY LISTEN

Active listening means really focusing on the speaker, tuning in, and listening for the feelings behind the content. So, for example, if someone says to you: "I can't believe you let my son check this book out. This is trash!"

Some possible responses:

"Sounds like you're really angry that your child was able to check this book out." "I imagine you must be really upset about this."

"So... are you feeling frustrated right now?" "I hear you saying that you're disappointed in the library."

"You sound really worried/concerned/upset."

This validates the person's feelings, and may open the floodgates for him/her to vent more. Just stay with the feelings as long as they need to vent, and don't take it personally. It isn't about you. Continue active listening during all the other steps.

For more info: Nichols, Michael P. *The Lost Art of Listening*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1995. Or look for anything by psychologist, Carl Rogers, on empathy and listening.

2. ATTITUDE CHECK

Are you feeling judgmental or defensive? Are you willing to make an internal shift to respond in a non-judgmental, non-defensive manner? It helps to focus on this ONE INDIVIDUAL in front of you in the present moment. Try to cultivate an attitude of respect, openness, and kindness.

3. APOLOGIZE

Take this step only if your attitude check revealed that you are feeling non-judgmental and are not defensive. Otherwise it may sound insincere. This is not about agreeing with the person's objection, but rather is expressing regret that they are unhappy. Keep it basic and simple.

Try statements like:

"I'm so sorry that you had that experience." "I'm sorry that you were offended."

Aside from helping you make a genuine connection with this person by sharing your own regrets, apologies are very disarming, and can help defuse the situation.

4. ASSURE

Assure the person making the complaint. This is the “formal complaint” step. You may not have to do this if the person really felt listened to in the previous steps. Simply explain your materials reconsideration procedure, and give them the form to fill out. Tell them what to expect.

Here's what I usually say:

“If you decide you would like to make a formal complaint, here is the form that we use. I'll send this downtown to our Materials Selection office for review, and our Executive Director should send you a written response in 2 weeks.”

5. ASSIMILATE

Welcome the person making the complaint back into the library community by asking what they would suggest we add to the collection.

You could say things like:

“We do try to have something for everyone, and I would really like to make sure your views are represented. If you think of subjects we could cover better, or if you know of some titles you would suggest we purchase, please let me know.”

SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES FACING CHALLENGED MATERIALS

The Oklahoma Library Association is supported by ALA's [Office for Intellectual Freedom](#) and through resources provided by ALA's [Intellectual Freedom: Issues and Resources](#). The following resources are highlighted and include sample policies and procedures, how to handle a challenge, and more. Every library should have a strong materials selection policy to guide in the acquisition of materials and to refer to should there be a challenge to materials in the library. Libraries needing assistance in developing Materials Selection Policies are urged to contact the [Oklahoma Department of Libraries](#) or the [Library Media Section of the Oklahoma State Department of Education](#) and use ALA OIF resources for guidance.

- [How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Resources](#)
- [Challenge Reporting Form](#)
- [Sample Letter to Complainant](#)
- [Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries](#)
- [Formal Written Requests for Reconsideration](#)
- [Guidelines for Reconsideration Committees with Sample Committee Report](#)
- [Conducting a Challenge Hearing](#)
- [Working with the Media](#)
- [Selection and Reconsideration Toolkit](#)
- [Answering Questions about Youth and Access to Library Resources](#)
- [Working with Community Leaders](#)