

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING PATRON COMPLAINTS

All Library users have the right to question Library policies, procedures, materials and services. Treat these inquiries as a request for information. When responding, be patient and calm. Try not to feel defensive: you are not being attacked personally.

You are not trying to win a battle or to defend the honor of the Library. Your efforts should center on listening, understanding and explaining. Don't let the volume of a patron's voice or his attitude obscure the content of his remarks.

Guidelines for dealing with a patron who is angry, critical, or simply forceful in expressing himself are listed below. This approach will convey your willingness to listen to his question or problem and respond to it. As you respond with interest and information, the patron will become calmer and more at ease, and the two of you can concentrate on solving the problem rather than having a confrontation.

STAFF:

1. Listen to the patron without interrupting. Let the patron describe the situation.
2. Demonstrate that your goal is to understand. Support your words with appropriate body language --- a quiet, calm voice, undivided attention, eye contact, nodding or saying "I see" or "um."
3. Rephrase what the patron has said, saying "I want to be sure I understand."
4. Do not argue with the patron.
5. Recognize that we make mistakes. If it's our mistake, admit it to the patron. Do not, however, place the blame on a specific staff member.
6. Explain appropriate procedures or policy. If the problem is caused by simple confusion, an explanation is often satisfying. Seek ways to say yes to the patron.
7. Explain alternatives so the patron can solve the problem now or avoid it in the future. This conveys a feeling of cooperation and concern on your part.
8. Some patrons will not be satisfied with being heard and being given options. In this situation, refer the patron to the Library Manager. If a patron wants to take a complaint further, the Library Manager will take the complaint to the Board.

9. Try to deal with the patron privately to defuse the situation but **do not place yourself in personal danger through seclusion.**
10. If, at any time, a patron becomes loud or hostile, refer him/her to the Library Manager if available, explaining that this person is more appropriate to help with the concern/problem.
11. As a last resort in a situation that has gotten out of control, or if you become afraid of a patron, call the police.

LIBRARY MANAGER:

1. Try to diffuse the situation by going over the same steps as above. If the patron still is not satisfied, refer the person to an available Board Member.
2. Immediately call the Board Member to provide background information and steps taken to that point.

BOARD MEMBERS:

1. If contacted by the patron, follow steps above.
2. If patron is not satisfied, provide the Board President's name and contact information.
3. Contact the president.

Adopted by the Afton Free Library Board
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