



Materials Concern Checklist

CCBC Intellectual Freedom Information Services

Every situation is different, but you can be ready to respond if someone has a question, concern or complaint about a book or other resource in the library or classroom.

In Advance of an Encounter

- Follow your institution's current policies and procedures for materials selection.
- Be familiar with the steps to follow in case of a concern or challenge.
- Keep printed copies of policies in a "Just in Case" folder along with this checklist.
- Talk with colleagues, administrators and members of the community about how materials are chosen to support the library or school/classroom goals. Make the intellectual freedom of children and teens part of discussions.

At the Time of an Encounter

- Breathe and try to relax.
- Listen openly.
- Thank the person for bringing the concern to you.
- Be prepared to talk about how materials are chosen.
- Indicate the next steps if this initial conversation does not resolve the concern or question.
- Be clear on follow-up, if any, you will take.
- Smile and say thank you (again).

After an Encounter

- Document what happened.
- Inform your supervisor.
- Call for assistance from the CCBC at 608-263-3720 if needed.
(In Wisconsin only. Outside Wisconsin, contact the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom at 1-800-545-2433 ext. 4221.)
- Provide the individual with any follow-up you indicated (e.g., a list of other titles their child might enjoy; Request for Reconsideration Form if this was discussed).
- Continue to document any conversations/actions related to this encounter.
- If it looks like a challenge is pending or the situation may otherwise escalate, make sure you and your supervisor discuss informing other staff and indicating who should speak for library/school in case questions arise from patrons, media, etc.

Tips and Talking Points

for Dealing with a Concern or Complaint about Library or Classroom Materials

- Don't agree OR argue.
- Think of this conversation as an opportunity to talk about the library with an engaged member of your community.
- Affirm the value of the individual's interest and involvement as a concerned parent/ grandparent/ community member, (e.g., "Thank you for coming to me with your concern. We wish everyone were as involved in what their children are reading/what's happening in the library/classroom.")
- Don't try to defend the material in question. Instead, address the broader goals of the collection or classroom (e.g., providing a wide range of materials to meet many needs and interests; encouraging critical thinking, engagement with the wider world).

In a library: 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. Note that for every family the decision may be, and probably will be, different.

- 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 probably IS an adult who was not prepared to see the content that surprised or shocked them or 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, not to lecture.
- Be smart: public library and school email and computer files are not confidential. However, emailing your supervisor can be a way to begin establishing a trail for your records; you may also choose to additionally keep a record by hand in your "Just in Case" folder.
- Ask to sit down with your supervisor and go over the policies and procedures together. You can say, "I know we want to make sure we're following the board-approved policies and procedures. I thought we could go over them together and talk about what happened so far and what, if anything, we need to do next." You might find yourself in the position of having to remind your supervisor of what is/isn't supposed to happen since sometimes the desire to "take care of things" can supersede following what is stated.
- The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) provides Wisconsin librarians and teachers with title-specific information about questioned or challenged books. The CCBC does not take a position on the title or situation, but will provide information, guidance, and referral.
- If there is a challenge, make sure the Reconsideration Committee (which may be a separate committee, or the library board) has a copy of the selection policies, procedures and guidelines, along with any information you have gathered or been sent about the material in question (such as reviews, recommended lists, etc.). The job of the committee is to determine whether the book meets the established criteria and guidelines for classroom/library materials.
- Make note of anything in your policies and procedures that are unclear as things develop. These should be addressed after the situation has been resolved. Changes will require board approval.
- After everything is over, sit down with your supervisor and others to review how the process went.

Cooperative Children's Book Center

Contact:

School of Education
University of Wisconsin-Madison
401 Teacher Education, 225 N. Mills St.
Madison, WI 53706

Phone: (608) 263-3720
E-mail: ccbcinfo@education.wisc.edu

See also:

*What IF: Questions and Answers on
Intellectual Freedom*

A CCBC Q & A forum for librarians, teachers, administrators and others thinking through what the principles of intellectual freedom look like in practice.

<http://go.wisc.edu/s4ofsl>



Infographic created by CCBC librarian Megan Schliesman and Tessa Michaelson Schmidt.

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