

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS SCHOOL LIBRARIES

GOAL

To respond to the complaint in a way that will:

- * Acknowledge the right to complain
- * Show an effort to respond to the patron's needs
- * Consider alternatives
- * Stay within school policies
- * Uphold the First Amendment and Fourth Amendment rights of all library users

BE PREPARED

- * Know and understand the U.S. and State Constitutional principles involved
- * Know your library and school's policies
- * Know what your responsibility is
- * Know whom to refer to; the appropriate forms, etc.
- * Remember that having a book (or other material) in the collection, or accessible through Internet or interlibrary loan, does not mean that you or the library endorses it
- * Seek to understand why people complain about library materials or services
- * Seek to acknowledge what is offensive to ourselves and prepare ourselves to deal with it.

THINGS TO DO (if appropriate & possible)

- * Listen carefully to the complaint
- * Establish a common ground
- * Demonstrate respect for the challenger's values, beliefs, opinions
- * Treat the complaint seriously
- * Be polite - even in response to rudeness or attack
- * Offer assistance in finding something that will meet the patron's needs
- * Suggest the consequences of granting government (the school district or the library) the right to censor (complainers have rarely considered that someone who would censor what they want to read may take control)
- * Explain the school's complaint policy, procedure & process
- * Thank the person for expressing interest in the library or for being involved with their child's reading and use of the library
- * Provide information about next step available if not satisfactorily resolved

THINGS TO AVOID

- * Attack, intimidation, escalation
- * Defensiveness (words or body language)
- * Overreaction
- * Philosophical debate
- * Defense of literary quality (defend place in collection)
- * Quoting policy as the only response
- * Compromising library or school policy or the principles of intellectual freedom upon which this country is based.