

# How to Respond to Book Challenges in Our Schools

Created by



Adapted by



School libraries are the cornerstone of the community. The purpose of a school library is to serve the information needs of all students. As they curate a collection that incorporates a broad spectrum of ideas and information, it is inevitable that people will occasionally encounter resources that they believe to be inappropriate or offensive.

This is a step-by-step guide to responding to informal and formal book challenges in school libraries.

## **Listen**

When hearing a parent's complaint, listen thoughtfully and respectfully. Listening with care is a vital first step in your response and cannot be skipped or rushed. Being a good listener keeps lines of communication open.

Try to elicit the specific reason for their concern, whether they have read the entire work or only parts, and the specific action they would like the library to take.

## **Offer your assistance in finding other materials**

Do not promise to act or appear to agree with the individual. Instead, offer your assistance in finding something else that would better meet child's needs. You and the parent may find

resources that evaluate the content of materials (for example, Common Sense Media) useful when making selections.

### **Describe the library's mission and the rights of parents and students**

To provide access to information for all users, diverse collections with resources from many points of view. All library users, including students, have the First Amendment right to borrow, read, view, and listen to library resources.

Parents and guardians play a major role in guiding their child's reading and library use. Each family has the right to determine which library resources are acceptable for their children and must afford the same right to other parents.

### **Be thankful and acknowledge the sharing of opinions**

Thank the parent for being involved in their child's education. Many expressions of concern end after the individual has an opportunity to be heard and express personal feelings about a library resource. Make notes about the conversation and report the conversation to the library director or principal.

### **If the parent asks for the material to be removed, explain the formal process**

Explain the formal reconsideration process and provide a copy of the procedure and *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials* form. Often people who have a concern would like immediate action and are not aware of the formal process.

The procedure and form should be created and approved before any book challenge reaches this step. The *Request for Reconsideration* form should solicit information such as whether the parent has a student enrolled in your school, what portions of the challenged material they have personally read, how the issue was brought to their attention, their specific concerns and how they relate to school policies and state educational standards, and the action they are asking the school to take.

### **Submit a *Request for Reconsideration* form**

To initiate the process of evaluating library material, the parent completes and submits a Request for Reconsideration form to the school.

Inform school administration upon receipt of the completed form.

### **Form a Materials Evaluation Committee**

The committee will evaluate the material in question and should include a school librarian or media specialist, a school administrator, faculty member(s) (especially from the English department), a representative of the PTA, and member(s) of the community.

### **Evaluate the material**

Each committee member will complete an *Evaluation of Materials* form, giving particular attention to the concerns that were expressed in the *Request for Reconsideration*. The committee will meet and formalize a written decision regarding the removal of the library materials in question.

The materials under reconsideration should remain available while the evaluation is underway.

### **Provide a written decision**

The written decision of the Materials Evaluation Committee should be given to the person(s) submitting the Request for Reconsideration.