
Dealing with Challenges

When a book is challenged in your library, what do you do? Is there a policy in place to deal with such an event? Both the American Library Association (ALA) and Canadian Library Association (CLA) offer guidelines on how to deal with challenges of library materials.

According to the ALA's *Challenged Materials: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, every library should have a written selections policy that is clearly defined and approved by the library's governing body. In this case, no challenged material that meets the criteria for said selections policy should be removed. Additionally, the ALA's *Freedom to Read Statement* states that "free

communication is essential to the preservation of a free society," and the CLA's *Statement on Intellectual Freedom* makes it clear that "libraries have a basic responsibility for the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom." It is also essential to be aware that freedom of expression is detailed in both the American Constitution and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It is important to remember that libraries do not take the place of parents or guardians when it comes to determining suitable material for youth. Maturity, family values, reading level, and interests are only some of the factors that influence the reading, viewing, and listening

choices of every child, and parents and guardians are the people most aware of these factors. The ALA's *Freedom to Read Statement* strongly asserts that "it is the responsibility of publishers and librarians . . . to contest encroachments upon [the freedom to read] by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large". While it is important to respect patrons and their opinions, it is not necessary to take actions reflecting these opinions.

Ultimately, both the ALA and CLA encourage, and even require, librarians to take a stance on freedom of expression, regardless of the age of the patrons.

For further information...

Challenged Materials: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (1990)

www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=interpretations&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=76528

Code of Ethics - www.cla.ca/about/ethics.htm

Coping with Challenges – Kids and Libraries: What You Should Know (1999)

www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=dealing&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=77095

Library Bill of Rights (2005) - www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm

Statement on Intellectual Freedom - www.cla.ca/about/intfreed.htm

The Freedom to Read Statement (2004)

www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ftrstatement/freedomreadstatement.htm

