

## Before the censor comes!

Be prepared! Train yourself; train your staff; train your board!

[Dealing With Complaints and Challenges for Directors \(nicheacademy.com\)](https://nicheacademy.com)

Every library should have a written process for handling formal complaints as part of its collection development policy.

Include a “script” for staff to follow when addressing the complaint.

Include specific instructions on how the complaint should be reported and to whom.

**Every library should have a Collection Development Policy: (training)**

[ABLE - Collection Development Policy \(nicheacademy.com\)](https://nicheacademy.com)

**Sample Collection Development Policy (includes request for reconsideration of materials):**

[Collection-Development-Policy.docx.pdf \(oilregionlibraries.org\)](https://oilregionlibraries.org)

Be sure to include Intellectual Freedom Core documents:

[Intellectual Freedom Core Documents | Tools, Publications & Resources \(ala.org\)](https://ala.org)

**INFORMAL COMPLAINTS AND EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN:** [How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Resources | Tools, Publications & Resources \(ala.org\)](https://ala.org)

Informal complaints can occur at any time, and every library should have a process for handling verbal concerns. Library workers and educators who receive expressions of concern should courteously refer them to the person responsible for responding to concerns, who should take the following steps:

1. Acknowledge that every person has the right to question library resources. A library user with a complaint should feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously. Listen thoughtfully and respectfully. 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.
2. Do not promise to act or appear to agree with the individual. Instead, offer assistance in finding something else that would better meet the person’s needs.
3. If the person requests the item be removed from the library’s collection, explain that although the individual may be offended by the library resource, others may not have the same perspective. Describe how library materials are selected. Libraries have diverse collections with resources from many points of view, and a library’s mission is to provide access to information for all users. All library users have the First Amendment right to borrow, read, view, and listen to library resources.
4. If the individual is concerned about a children’s or young adult resource, explain that parents and guardians play a major role in guiding their child’s reading and library use. Often a person’s concern about a children’s or young adult book involves a desire to “protect all children” by removing that item from the collection or restricting access to it. Explain that each family has the right to determine which library resources are acceptable for its children and must accord

the same right to other parents.

5. Many expressions of concern end after the individual has had an opportunity to express personal feelings about a library resource. The person only wanted to be heard and have his opinions acknowledged. No further action is needed. If this is the case, thank the person for their interest, make notes about the conversation, and file them for future reference. Additionally, report the conversation to the library director or principal.
6. If the concerned individual is not satisfied during the discussion and wants the item removed, explain the formal reconsideration process and its timeline. Often people who have a concern would like immediate action and are not aware of the length of time this procedure takes. State what your policy says about the availability of the material during the reconsideration process. Best practice is that the resource under reconsideration will not be removed from use or have access restricted pending completion of the process.
7. Provide a copy of the library's collection development policy and resource reconsideration form. Stress that no action is taken unless the form is fully completed by the concerned individual. Explain that the submission of a completed form will trigger the formal reconsideration process, and that the document will become part of the public record.
8. After the conversation, make notes, date them, and retain the information to provide background in the event that a request for formal reconsideration form is filed. Remember that all such notes become part of the record of the reconsideration process and may become public records.
9. Keep your director or principal informed of any concerns expressed, whether you feel they have been successfully resolved or not. Knowing that a concern was expressed helps that individual respond knowledgeably if the concerned person contacts them.

**Formal Requests for Reconsideration:**

[Formal Requests for Reconsideration | Tools, Publications & Resources \(ala.org\)](#)

**Challenge Reporting: If you have a challenge that makes it to a review for reconsideration, report the challenge to ALA:**

[Challenge Reporting | Tools, Publications & Resources \(ala.org\)](#)

Articles:

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, Blog: [Intellectual Freedom News 5/20/2022 - Intellectual Freedom Blog \(ala.org\)](#)

[Book ban efforts by conservative parents take aim at library apps \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

[Book Bans a Focus of State of America's Libraries 2022 Report | American Libraries Magazine](#)

[Surge in Book Challenges Press Kit | News and Press Center \(ala.org\)](#)

[More than 25 organizations join forces with the American Library Association to Unite Against Book Bans | News and Press Center \(ala.org\)](#)