

## Workshop Summary

Merribeth Advocate, Outreach & Education Coordinator

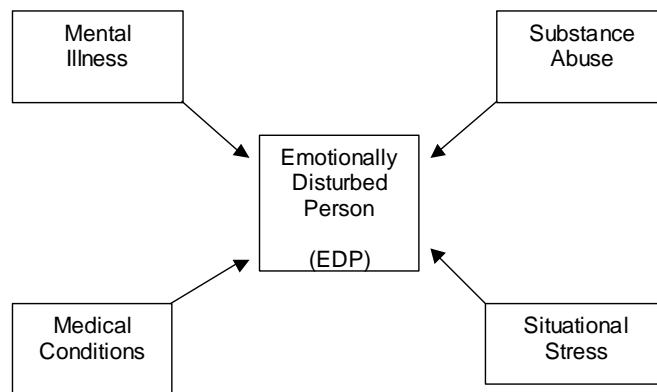
### Dealing with Problem Patrons: positive ways to deal with aberrant behavior

#### Presenters:

- Cort Engelken, the Director of the VCS Center for Conflict Resolution, a program sponsored by the New York State Unified Court System, which helps people with alternative ways to resolve conflicts.
- Sergeant John Hughes, a patrol sergeant with the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, who has trained with the DC Dept. of Mental Hygiene in their Police Mental Health Program. This topic is also one of the subjects he teaches at the Academy and at the in-service level.

#### Introduction:

There are many outside influences that affect everyone, and emotionally disturbed people may feel them more intensely.



#### What are the benefits of discussing a specific problem patron with my co-workers?

- Consult with your colleagues to get some perspective and to raise the awareness of staff in your library. Maybe that patrons behavior is not as bad as you thought (if mildly disruptive, annoying or eccentric) – or maybe it is worse (if threatening, dangerous, deviant or disruptive).
- Emotional support.
- Use teamwork to support each other and bring a fresh approach – but don't gang up on the patron. If the situation looks to them like "two against one", the problem can escalate.

#### What do I need to be aware of?

- Avoid escalating the problem.
- Your attitude can set the stage for a problem. Don't whisper, joke or laugh. Don't be judgmental.
- Don't avoid dealing with a problem situation. Deal with it as soon as it comes to your attention
- Never argue!
- Don't threaten. If you need to call the police, do it. You do not have to warn the patron before calling the police.
- Don't use excuses, don't blame the "policy". Leave the policy out of the discussion, as it refocuses the attention away from the problem behavior.

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- Don't lose your temper. Never be drawn into a physical altercation.
- Maintain good eye contact, don't stare.
- Limit the choices you present, don't confuse.
- Maintain appropriate personal space, don't touch.
- Don't deceive, you may be dealing with this person again in the future.

### **How do I know when the police should be called?**

- Use common sense. If unacceptable patron behavior interferes with others use of the library, or threatens anyone's safety, police should be called.
- You do not have to warn the patron that you are calling the police.

### **What branch of the police should I call?**

- Dialing 911 will get you the quickest response in your area. However, you may wish to call the State Police, County Sheriff or local police directly, particularly if you have formed a relationship with them.

### **What are the most important things I can do *in advance* to prepare for a potential problem patron?**

- Know your library's rules and have them spelled out in a current, inclusive patron behavior policy. Three sample behavior policies and two sample incident reports are included in this packet.
- Build a relationship with your local police. Talk to them if you have concerns about leaving late at night. Ask if they can cruise by at recurring general problem times (ex: Thursday nights). Call the station and invite a patrol officer to walk through the library anytime they want.
- Have a prearranged code in your library that you use when you want another co-worker to call the police. For example use "Please get me a *blue form*" or "Please call *Mr. Cook*. He'll know what to do." Blue form and Mr. Cook are both code words for "Call the Police!"

### **In conclusion:**

"We are unafraid and are prepared to deal with difficult situations in a constructive manner, armed with our policies and our phones."