

“The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in the insidious encroachments by men of zeal, well-meaning, but without understanding.”

Justice Louis Brandeis, 1928

## When the Censor Comes Guidelines for Coping with Questions and Challenges

*Despite your policies, procedures, and preparations the censor still may pose questions and challenges. The following suggestions and strategies may help you to defuse those situations.*

1. Be calm, courteous and professional. Every question deserves an informed response.
2. Move confrontations out of the public service area. Refer all complaints to the most appropriate staff member.
3. Respect the sincerity of the patron’s concerns. Listen attentively. Remain silent rather than be argumentative.
4. Make sure you understand the exact nature of the complaint. Restate concerns to the patron to achieve absolute clarity.
5. Deal with each item separately. Keep the discussion focused on specifics of language, content, genre, accessibility, etc.
6. Explain the collection development, materials selection and reconsideration policies.
7. Provide a reconsideration form and describe the procedure and time frame for dealing with complaints.
8. Try to determine if the patron is acting independently or is an agent of an organized local or national campaign.
9. Keep a detailed written record of the incident.
10. Contact the director / administrator / board of trustees as soon as possible.
11. Alert the staff.

## When the Censor Comes *continued*

12. Designate one, and only one, library spokesperson to inform, respond to and update local media and elected officials. Refer all calls and visitors to that person. The spokesperson must return all calls.
13. When speaking to the media, be concise. Present the facts – describe the nature of the complaint and summarize the materials selection policy -- and what action will be taken.
14. Ask for help from colleagues, community organizations, allies, Friends, etc. Encourage them to organize a highly visible and vocal anti-censorship, pro-library campaign. Acknowledge their help and thank them when it's over.