

Morrill Public Library

Procedures for Handling Problem Behavior in the Library

Problem Behavior Definition

It is the responsibility of the library staff to help protect the safety of all library patrons. Many library patrons may exhibit strange behavior from time to time but pose no threat to library activities or to other patrons. Staff members must determine when a patron's behavior becomes a problem. The following are four broad categories that help define problem behavior:

1. Inappropriate use of the library... this may include eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping or loitering on library premises.
2. Verbal abuse of a staff member or a patron.
3. Disruptive behavior... a patron may willfully and purposefully disturb staff or patrons by loud talk, noise, or unruly actions.
4. Illegal actions... this may include theft, vandalism, indecent exposure, soliciting, etc.

Response

In many cases, potentially volatile situations can be minimized by the attitude and actions exhibited by the staff. The following guidelines should be observed when dealing with problem patrons:

1. Respect each patron's dignity. Do not appear to be overly suspicious or defensive. Do not antagonize the patron with your attitude.
2. Be clear and precise about the rules. Remind the patron that the rules apply to everyone and are not aimed at him/her personally.
3. When working with a patron who is angry or exhibiting bizarre behavior, be careful to avoid entrapment of yourself in dead-end shelf areas, etc. Also, if possible, avoid making the patron feel entrapped.
4. When a patron becomes angry and aggressive, keep a safe distance between you and the patron and adopt a formal manner. Formality, not hostility, will help.
5. Think through the options that are available. Devise a "game plan" that might work in most situations.
6. Be supportive of each other. It is not necessary for one staff member to deal with a problem patron alone.

Procedures

Occasionally a patron cannot be dealt with in a rational manner and must be asked to leave the premises or be ejected. The following procedures have been devised to help staff cope with this type of situation.

1. Inform your co-workers and the Director about any patron who may present a serious problem so watchfulness can be maintained.
2. Call the police if you observe an illegal act, or you are threatened with violence, or believe a person is dangerous and threatening to other staff or patrons. Make the call from a non-public area if possible. Give your name and that you are a library employee, and briefly explain the situation.
3. Ask a person who is disruptive, but not violent to quiet down. A second warning should be delivered with the understanding that if they do not comply they will be asked to leave the library premises.
4. A person who has been warned the second time and still refuses to modify his or her behavior will be asked to leave the library immediately.
5. If a disruptive person refuses to leave after being requested to do so, call the police immediately. Make the call from a non-public area if possible. Give your name and that you are a library employee, and briefly explain the situation.
6. If a child is involved in an incident that may result in harm to the child, place the child in a secure area and notify their parents and call the police.
7. Inform the Library Director of **any** disruptive or inappropriate behavior and file an **Incident Report**. The Incident Report forms are on a clipboard in the workroom near the sink.
8. Patron complaints about the actions of another patron, although not observed by staff, must also be reported to the Library Director and an Incident Report filed. It is the responsibility of the patron to file a formal complaint with the police.
9. **Criminal Trespass Order.** If the library staff has documented flagrant or on-going behavior by a patron that is in violation of posted standards of conduct, the Library Director, with the approval of the Board of Trustees, shall write a letter informing said patron he will no longer be permitted access to the library or its services. The letter should include the reasons for suspension of library privileges, the length of suspension and the consequences if the suspension is ignored. If the patron should choose to enter the library after being requested not to do so, the police will be called and the patron will be arrested for criminal trespass.