LIANZA TOOLKIT - FREEDOM TO READ

Quick guide for **frontline library staff** who receive complaints from the public about resources and events the library offers.

For more information go to https://www.lianza.org.nz/resources/freedom-to-read/

AREA	YOUR ROLE	EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES
Situation	Sometimes members of the public make complaints about items in a library collection, and request for items to be removed. This includes anything in the library's collection: books, DVDs, e-books. The complaint may also concern library events, displays, or posters. The library should have a process in place for dealing with such instances.	Complaint example: *"Today I was in the young children's picture book section with our daughter and was shocked to see a book titled 'If you're a drag queen and you know it.' I do not see this as suitable for young children - generally there are good reasons for R ratings and why should a topic usually found in adult night clubs/entertainment scene be aimed at children? I'm not complaining about diversity - just an age-appropriate consideration of your books as young children will be browsing these."*
Principles	Libraries protect the freedom to read and to access information. Libraries oppose censorship and seek to represent a range of viewpoints and opinions in the collection. Libraries generally do not remove items from the collection on the basis of causing offense. Help customers understand why your library may have materials they are uncomfortable with. ▪ The public has the right to make complaints or challenge items in the collection. ▪ These complaints should be treated fairly and respectfully. ▪ The variety of viewpoints and people's right to express their opinion is endorsed. ▪ Treating complaints seriously encourages user involvement and participation.	Library statements on freedom of information: ► LIANZA Statement on Freedom of Information IFLA Statement on Censorship: ► IFLA Statement on Censorship READING is a foundational skill, critical to future learning, and to exercising our democratic freedoms. WE CAN TRUST individuals to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. PARENTS HAVE THE RIGHT to guide their children's reading and education, but parents should not be making decisions for other parents' children. A small group of parents should not dictate what books other people's children are allowed to read. BOOKS ARE TOOLS for understanding complex issues. Limiting young people's access to books does not protect them from life's complex and challenging issues. YOUNG PEOPLE deserve to see themselves reflected in a library's books.
Policy	Make sure you know your library's policies on collection development, displays, and acceptable behaviour. Read up on your governing organisations strategy or goals, you can also refer to them if they align with principles in the collection policy. These can protect you and help you have a conversation with customers.	
Legal requirements: Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office	Libraries must follow the classifications assigned by Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office. If there are age restrictions you must check the age of the person wanting to borrow an item. If a person believes an item should be censored or restricted, they can contact the classification office. You can direct patrons to Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office's make a classification request if they believe an item should be censored or classified.	If you see a red restricted label that looks the same as a film label, it means it has been legally restricted to people above the age on the label. It cannot be lent to someone under the age on the label. These are generally kept in a restricted items collection and available only on request.

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Processes	Understand your customer's right to challenge content they think will do harm. Make sure you know your library's processes to review challenged content. Ask your manager what the process is and have it readily available.	For example: ▪ Is there a team that deals with complaints who's email address you hand out? ▪ Do you have a form the complainant can fill out?
Support	Know who to escalate challenges or protests or harassment to Participate in debrief sessions to improve safety and response.	For example: ▪ Does your library have security in case a situation escalates? ▪ Do you get your manager? ▪ Does your team or department have debrief sessions to learn from incidents?
Handling in the moment	A complaint can be very challenging, but it is the library staff's responsibility to handle complaints in a fair and respectful manner, without becoming defensive or reacting from our own opinions. **If the person is behaving aggressively or the situation is escalating, remove yourself from the situation and contact your supervisor or security.**	Remain calm, and listen politely so they feel heard. This is the hardest part of the process! If you are able, use the statements you have on hand and help the person understand that you have diversity in the collection, how materials are selected, or that you don't remove items based on causing offense. Ask them if they'd like to make a complaint. If so, you can activate your formal procedure. Even if they don't want to make a complaint, record the incident. Let your manager or collections librarians know.