

Pocket guide to de-escalation

It is inevitable that library staff will encounter a hostile community member at some point. Here are brief guidelines to help you feel more prepared.

KNOW YOUR POLICY: If someone wants to film in the library or challenge a book, be sure you know your library's policy and where it is posted. Have challenge forms printed and ready to give someone if that's what they want.

DE-ESCALATE VERSUS INTERVENTION: If at any point you feel unsafe, change from de-escalation to intervention, whether that be getting your manager or calling the police.

LISTEN: Practice active listening to keep you engaged in the conversation to understand what they want. You don't have to agree with their opinions to listen and understand what they want. For example, if they tell you that your library shouldn't carry a particular book because of the topic, don't argue with them. Instead say, "I'm hearing that you'd like to file a book challenge. Here's the form to do so." Withhold judgment. Paraphrase back to them their request. Use pauses, stay calm. Doing so can diffuse the person's intense emotions and create a more positive interaction.

FORECAST: Try to let the person understand what you're doing next to reduce suspicion, develop trust, and encourage calm. "I'm going to move here to find the policy you are looking for..." Model the behavior you want them to show.

PROVIDE CLOSURE: Have the attitude that there is always something that can be done. Offer a solution, form, referral, etc.

More tips:

- Acknowledge frustration
- Show empathy
- Don't argue
- Give choices
- Distance yourself from the negative.
- Set limits and leave if necessary. Don't compromise safety.