

# Portage Lake District Library

## Complaint Response Manual



# Table of Contents

<b>Complaint Response Framework: Code 1</b>	<b>2</b>
Code 1: Noise Complaint	3
Noise Complaint: Role Playing	3
Code 1: Patron Hygiene Complaint	4
Patron Hygiene Complaint: Role Playing	4
Code 1: Patron in Library Without A Mask	6
No Mask: Role Playing	6
<b>Code 2 Response Framework</b>	<b>7</b>
Code 2: Sexual or Personal Advances	8
Sexual or Personal Advances: Role Playing	8
Code 2: Defensive Patrons	9
Defensie Patron: Role Playing	10
<b>Code 3 Response Framework</b>	<b>11</b>
Code 3: Verbal Harassment	13
Verbal Harassment: Role Playing	14
Code 3: Refusal to Leave	15
Role Playing: Refusal to Leave Part 1	16
Role Playing: Refusal to Leave Part 2	16
Code 3: Sexual Harassment	18
Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 1	18
Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 2	19
Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 3	19

# Complaint Response Framework: Code 1

## **Purpose:**

Responding to concerns and complaints in a positive and proactive way will help ensure people feel listened to and taken care of. The way we respond can often keep situations from escalating into more serious complaints or situations.

## **Guidelines:**

### **1. Frame Your Response**

Stay proactive and positive. It's important not to take patron attitudes or choices personally. If a patron appears angry, frustrated or upset, stay calm and neutral. Focus on finding a solution to the issue.

### **2. Empathize**

Give the patron a chance to be heard. Listen carefully to the patrons' issues or complaints and put yourself into the person's shoes. Do not judge. Do your best to communicate that you understand and are sorry that the situation has occurred.

### **3. Give a rationale**

When a rule/situation that a patron disagrees with cannot be changed then offer a quick rationale for the decision. Help the patron know that PLDL has reasons for its policies.

### **4. Offer an Accommodation Alternative or Boundary Choices**

Use your best judgment to offer an accommodation or alternative. In case of disruptive behavior, boundary choices should be given.

**Note: Using the acronym KERA may help you remember the steps. It stands for Kind, Empathize, Rationale, and Accommodation.**

# Code 1: Noise Complaint

## Frame Your Response

You can choose how you look at these situations. Your first instinct may be irritation with the patron. Try to set this judgement aside.

### **Empathize** (*We're on the same side.*)

We all know what it is like to get carried away in conversation or engrossed in a game. Try very hard not to be irritated and remember what that feels like. The library functions as an important social setting outside of home and work, and as such, is not always a quiet place. Try to set aside any judgement and be pleased that the patron is using and (often) enjoying the space.

### **Rationale** (*Why do I care?*)

PLDL can't guarantee the quiet spaces that are traditionally associated with libraries, but PLDL can strive to accommodate patrons who wish to use the space for the more traditional responses of reading and study.

### **Accommodation(s)** (*What can I do?*)

Try not to think about accommodations as "giving in" to patrons. They are attempts to enable all of our patrons to peacefully coexist in the library. Your response to the situation is dependent on the situation, but some accommodation is almost always possible. Here are a few options:

- Are there quieter spaces in the library?
- Are there quieter times in the library?
- Do we have any noise reducers, like noise-cancelling headphones? (we don't but maybe we should!)

## Noise Complaint: Role Playing

A patron is involved in a conversation and her voice is carrying through the building. Other patrons are glancing between you and the patron, clerkly wondering if you will intervene. Another patron might actually complain about the noise.

**Possible Response:** Most likely this patron is unaware that her voice is carrying. She is not intentionally disrupting others, she'd simply not aware of them. You could ask her to lower her voice a little like this:

*Hi! You probably didn't realize it, but voices carry quite a bit in this part of the building. If you could talk just a little more quietly, we would appreciate it.* You could follow up with an offer, too:

*If you'd like, you can move into our lobby and then you won't need to worry about it at all.*

# Code 1: Patron Hygiene Complaint

## Frame Your Response

You may feel embarrassed approaching a patron about their odor or hygiene. This is normal, and the patron will most likely be embarrassed, too.

## Empathize (We're on the same side.)

Try to speak to the patron privately and approach the conversation with kindness and empathy. The patron is most likely unaware that their odor is so strong that it is disrupting patrons and staff. The patron may have a medical condition that makes it difficult to practice good personal hygiene, or may not realize how strong their perfume is.

## Rationale (Why do I care?)

When a patron's odor is so strong that it interrupts other patrons' ability to use the library, staff need to address the issue to preserve the right of all patrons to use the library.

## Accommodation(s)/Boundary (What can I do?)

If a patron's odor is so strong that it is overwhelming the space, it may be necessary to ask the patron to leave until the issue is resolved. However, in most cases, such as odor, the situation is not that extreme and other accommodations can be made. Consider the following:

- Are there other spaces in the library for the patron? Ask the patron to move to a more isolated area of the library.
- Does the patron have access to a shower & laundry facilities? If not, ask the patron if a Care Kit could help solve the issue. If the problem persists, it may be time to facilitate a meet-up between the patron and our library volunteer who works with social service agencies in the area.

## Patron Hygiene Complaint: Role Playing

A patron is sitting at the computer and has obvious body odor and grooming issues. You can smell the body odor from the desk, and a patron has quietly complained to you about it.

**Possible Response:** In this case the odor is obvious, so in order for patrons and staff to use the library comfortably, it's necessary to speak to the patron. Be kind. The patron may not know that their odor is so strong, or may not have access to a safe place to clean themselves. If possible, speak to them in an area where you can't be overheard to minimize embarrassment. Explain to the patron that the odor is disrupting others' use of the library and ask them to leave. If you feel it's appropriate, offer to connect the patron with places that can assist him. Tips:

Depersonalize by using “the odor” instead of “your odor”. To make the comment even more removed, you may even imply the issue is with the person’s clothes rather than themselves.

*Hi, I’m sorry to disrupt your work! I need to speak with you about something that might make you uncomfortable. First, Let me say we are happy to have you as a regular visitor, and love seeing you make use of the library. And recently, library staff have been made aware of body odor coming from you that is disturbing other patrons. I want to make sure that we understand what the problem might be so we can best serve you and our other patrons using the library simultaneously. While we have a policy against odor in the library, I want to make sure to help in any way, to ensure you still have access to the library.*

*Do you have access to laundry facilities? A shower? Are there other underlying issues I’m not understanding that might make it easier for me to help? Can I provide you with deodorant, soap, laundry detergent or laundromat tokens?*

*Unfortunately, I do need to ask you to leave the library until the issue is resolved. I hope to see you back at the library soon!*

# Code 1: Patron in Library Without A Mask

## Frame Your Response

You can choose how you look at these situations. Your first instinct may be irritation with the patron. Try to set this judgement aside.

### Empathize (*We're on the same side.*)

This patron may have forgotten their mask, forgotten about the mask requirement, or has a medical exemption. Try very hard not to be irritated and remember that we all make mistakes or sometimes forget about a new rule. Try to set aside any judgement and be pleased that the patron is using and (often) enjoying the space.

### Rationale (*Why do I care?*)

PLDL is following mandates from the state, such as the mask requirement, to ensure we are allowed to remain open to serve our patrons. Our local health department officials have tasked us with following these rules to ensure our staff and patrons remain safe, too.

### Accommodation(s) (*What can I do?*)

Try not to think about accommodations as “giving in” to patrons. They are attempts to enable all of our patrons to peacefully use library resources. Your response to the situation is dependent on the situation, but some accommodation is almost always possible. Here are a few options:

- Can we offer the patron a free mask for their visit to the library?
- Can we meet this patron's needs with curbside service? Or future needs through home delivery?
- Can we step outside with the patron and a digital device to help them?

## No Mask: Role Playing

A patron enters the library without a mask on and approaches the circulation desk for service. Other patrons are glancing between you and the patron, clearly wondering if you will enforce our mask policy.

**Possible Response:** This patron may be unaware they are breaking a rule. Start with a friendly reminder:

*Hi! You probably didn't know this, but we do require patrons to wear masks at all times in the Library. If you could just put your mask on, we would appreciate it.* You could follow up with an offer, too:

*If you'd like, you can grab a free, reusable mask from our lobby so that we can help you today.*

# Code 2 Response Framework

## **Purpose:**

In the library, staff often deal with people who are unintentionally offensive. It can be hard to know how to respond. Your goal is to be empathetic and kind, yet direct. This response framework will help you be kindly direct in dealing with these uncomfortable situations.

## **Guidelines:**

### **1. Remain calm and neutral**

Whatever the patron is doing may be personally distasteful, however, it is important to appear neutral. Do your best to remove personal judgement from the situation.

### **2. Give them an out but be direct**

Avoid embarrassing the patron by indicating that the behavior may have been unintentional. When people feel embarrassed, they often get defensive and this can escalate the situation. Examples of outs: I'm sure you didn't mean that but... I know you are just trying to be nice but... I totally understand what it's like to be a busy mom and needing some "me time" however....

### **3. Ask them to stop** (if necessary)

Explain why the behavior is unacceptable and ask them to stop or not to do it again.

**NOTES: If patrons become defensive or aggressive, move to Code 3 Response Framework. Using the acronym CDS may help you remember the steps. It stands for Calm, Direct, Stop.**



## Code 2: Sexual or Personal Advances

### What do sexual or personal advances in the library look like?

From time to time, members of the public may approach staff members with flirtatiousness, requests for a date, or overtures of personal friendship (requests to “hang out”). Our goal is to be kind and empathetic with our patrons, but it does not require you to allow patrons to make overly personal overtures.

#### 1. Remain calm and be kindly assertive *(be confident and don't show judgement)*

As a library staff member it's important to appear neutral, even if the patrons behavior makes you uncomfortable.

#### 2. Give them an out, but be direct *(try to reduce embarrassment)*

Let the patron know what your boundary is and be direct and firm without being aggressive.

#### 3. Ask them to stop

Explain why the behavior is unacceptable and ask them to stop or not to do it again. Your level of assertiveness should match their level of aggressiveness.

## Sexual or Personal Advances: Role Playing

A patron comes up to the service desk and comments, “That dress really flatters your figure.” You're uncomfortable with the comment, and feel it was inappropriate.

**Possible Response:** In this situation, you are fully empowered to use your own judgement. You have the right to make your feelings known and ask the patron not to comment on your appearance.

*I know you mean to be kind, but I don't discuss my appearance at work. Is there anything I can help you with today?*

OR

*I prefer not to discuss my appearance at work. Is there anything I can help you with today?*

You may escalate to a code 3 response at any point you feel appropriate. If the patron continues the interaction after being asked to stop, escalate to Code 3. You may choose to give them an out, or directly ask them to stop. If they do not stop, this escalates to Code 3: Sexual Harassment.

## Code 2: Defensive Patrons

### When might a patron get defensive?

Even when you are using the Complaint Response Framework, you may encounter people who respond to you in a defensive manner. You may be asking them to do something they do not know how to do. You may be interrupting them when they are otherwise occupied (on the phone, on the computer, in a conversation, etc.). They might even have a health issue or a language barrier that prevents them from understanding what you are saying. Everyone brings their own background to every situation and responds accordingly.

\*Note: A Code 3 scenario, Verbal Harassment or Verbal Fight, addresses someone verbally harassing a staff member or patron by attacking the person rather than the situation. If, at any point, a patron begins to attack you personally, or they are verbally harassing you, you should use the Code 3 scenario.

### How do I recognize defensive behaviors?

People may:

- Question you, “Why do I need to do this?” or “Who are you to tell me what to do?”
- Raise their voice
- Start talking faster
- Quit talking or stop making eye contact with you
- Fold their arms or use “closed” body language

#### 1. Remain calm and be kindly assertive

Defensive patrons are starting to lose rationality. They cannot process long-winded directions or explanations. At the first sign of defensive behavior, remain calm and use non-threatening body language.

- Angle your body slightly away with one foot behind - avoid squaring off with them.
- Hold your body in an open position - avoid crossing your arms.
- Keep space between you to avoid invading their personal space. If they lean away or put their hands up, give them more space.

#### 2. Give them an out

Always assume the best of the patron. Try to express that you are on the same side of the issue trying to resolve it.

#### 3. Ask them to stop

Tell them what you need them to do or stop doing. Use simple instructions. Break the expectations down into smaller steps, if needed. When questioned, answer their questions, but stay focused on resolving the situation. Kindly repeat your directive if they seem to be getting off-topic. As in Code 1, provide positive alternatives when possible. However, if the patron fails to follow your directives, you will need to state some clearly defined boundaries.

## Defensive Patron: Role Playing

A patron enters the library and walks by the circulation desk without a mask. You walk over to let them know visitors are required to wear a mask, using the Code 1 Framework. Rather than cooperating with your request, the patron immediately responds in a loud voice, “Why are you talking to me? I’m not bothering anyone and I’m medically exempt from wearing a mask!”

**Possible Response:** Keep your voice low (regardless of their volume), acknowledge that you realize this is inconvenient, but reiterate the request. Offer them an accommodation if they are unable to tolerate wearing a mask. If they continue to be defensive and uncooperative, be direct and explain what will happen if they do not comply.

*I am sorry to interrupt you, but we all have to wear masks in the library. It's frustrating, I know, but we are following these rules to ensure staff and patron safety. [If the patron continues to refuse...] Unfortunately, you cannot be in the library without a mask. I can meet you outside with any materials you need, but you cannot stay in the library without a mask.*

# Code 3 Response Framework

## **Purpose:**

Rarely, you will encounter situations in the library where you feel the physical or emotional wellbeing of staff and/or patrons is in jeopardy. This framework will help you assess the danger to yourself and others, and preserve the safety of library staff and patrons alike.

## **Guidelines:**

### **1. Assess danger or harm to staff and patrons**

If you feel that you or anyone else is in danger, call 911.

When possible, get another staff member to approach Code 3 interactions with you.

### **2. Remain calm and assertive**

Use a supportive stance by using non-threatening body language:

- Angle your body slightly away with one foot behind. This avoids the appearance of “squaring off” for a fight.
- Hold your body in an open position - avoid crossing your arms.
- Keep some space between you to avoid invading their personal space. If they lean away or put their hands up, step back a little.

Your level of assertiveness should match their level of aggressiveness.

### **3. Enforce boundaries**

*Physical Boundaries:* If you feel physically uneasy in any way, work to keep a barrier between you and the patron. Remain behind the desk or step back two steps. It is best to step away completely if you feel physically unsafe.

\* Get help: Ask another person to stand beside you if you feel uneasy. If you feel unsafe, step away and call 911 or ask another staff person to call 911.

*Verbal Boundaries:* Be directive – tell them what you want them to do or not do.

\*Example: If you are being insulted, quietly, but firmly, tell the person, “I’m going to ask you not to speak to me that way.”

\*Example: If the person has violated a rule and must be banned for a period, quietly, but firmly, tell the person, “You are going to need to leave the library now.” Tell the person when they may return.

#### **4. Afterward Regroup**

After the incident is over, step away from the desk. Breathe deeply. Debrief with your manager or a colleague. Write an incident report.

**Note: Using the acronym AREA may help you remember the steps. It stands for Assess Danger, Remain Calm, Enforce Boundaries, Afterward Regroup.**

## Code 3: Verbal Harassment

Though, hopefully, rare, sometimes you will encounter verbal harassment in the library. This can take the form of **verbal insults or offensive comments directed towards staff or patrons**. Staff are fully empowered to act to preserve the safety of themselves, other staff and patrons.

### **1. Assess danger or harm to staff and patrons**

If you feel at any time that the situation may escalate to a physical confrontation, or have any reason to doubt the safety of staff or patrons, call 911 as soon as you can safely do so.

### **2. Remain calm and assertive**

Use non-threatening but firm language and body language. Your level of assertiveness should match their level of aggressiveness. Keep your voice level, calm, and at a normal to low volume. Occasionally, a patron will not realize they are speaking so loudly until they hear you speaking so much more quietly than they are, and they will match their volume to yours.

Work with other staff to support each other. When possible, get another staff member to approach code 3 interactions. If, as another staff member, you see a patron interacting in a way that you feel can escalate into verbal harassment, walk over to the other staff member if you feel safe doing so. If not, get help. Get your manager, another staff member, or call the police. This shows support of your fellow staff (they are no longer alone) and sometimes interjecting another person into the conversation can deescalate the situation.

### **3. Enforce boundaries**

Be mindful of both physical and verbal boundaries. While rare, verbal harassment can escalate into a physical fight. When possible keep the desk between yourself and the patron. If not, step back two steps. It is best to step away completely if you feel physically unsafe.

### **4. Afterward Regroup**

Being insulted, sworn at or intervening in an argument can be nerve-racking. It's normal to feel upset and even shaky. After the incident is over, take a moment to step away from the desk to calm and collect yourself. Debrief with your manager or a colleague. Talking it through can help. Write an incident report.

## Verbal Harassment: Role Playing

A patron checked online and saw that he was being charged for a book. You follow the Code 1 Framework, empathize, and kindly offer to look into the matter, asking him for his library card so you can pull up his account. He starts shouting, "I shouldn't have to show my \*\*\*\* library card, I've been coming here for \*\*\*\* years! Are you \*\*\*\* stupid!"

**Possible Response:** The patron came into the library angry. Though you have done your best to help the patron, his response is making you unable to help him further; he is no longer responding to rational explanations and is verbally harassing a staff member. Firmly ask him to stop. If he does not, ask him to leave. You may start out by affirming your desire to help, alternatively, you can immediately ask him to stop.

*Sir, I want to help you. However, I can't help you when you are speaking to me like this. I need you to stop shouting and cursing. If you do not, you will need to leave the library.*

OR

*I have to ask you to stop speaking to me in this manner so that I can help you further. If you do not, you will need to leave for the day.*

## Code 3: Refusal to Leave

This framework will walk you through the process of calling the police, and explain the questions that you will be asked so that you will know what to expect when you call.

### 1. Assess danger or harm to staff and patrons

If you feel that you or anyone else is in danger, do not hesitate to call 911. Do not worry about bothering the police, they would much rather respond to a call and not be needed, than not be called in a situation that develops into an emergency. In addition to physical threats or danger, you may call 911 for a variety of reasons. For example:

- Verbal argument between patrons that may escalate into a fight
- You have asked a patron to leave and they do not. When a person does not leave after being told to leave, they are trespassing and breaking the law.
- A banned patron returns to the library during their banning and refuses to leave
- You are requesting police presence, but not intervention. An example of this is when a patron is legally open-carrying in the library, but their behavior is making you fear for the safety of staff and patrons.
- A medical emergency

### 2. Remain calm and assertive

Try to remain calm when speaking to the operator. Here are a few questions the operator may ask, with information about how to respond.

- **911 Operator:** What is the nature of your emergency?

**Response:** Explain what is happening as succinctly and clearly as possible.

- **911 Operator:** What is your Address?

**Response:** Confirm your address.

- **911 Operator:** What is a good number to call if we get disconnected? Or Is this a good number to call back if we get disconnected?

**Response:** Give the operator the library's phone number. If your cell phone is in an accessible place, that may be a good number to give the operator.



### 3. Afterward Regroup

In some cases, the incident will be resolved before the police arrive. For example, if you call the police because a banned patron will not leave, that patron will often leave before the police arrive. This is normal, and you shouldn't worry about having called the police for nothing. Just call 911 to cancel the request.

#### Role Playing: Refusal to Leave Part 1

A patron is loudly facetimeing in an area of the library that is designated as a quiet zone. Following the Code 1 Framework, staff empathize and offer to reserve him a study room to finish his conversation. He not only refuses, but yells and berates staff to the point where they ask him to leave. He refuses to leave.

**Possible Response:** The patron is now legally trespassing because he has been asked to leave and has refused. Inform the patron that he is trespassing and the police will be called. Call the police.

911 Operator: *What is the nature of your emergency?*

Response: *A man has verbally harassed our staff and has been asked to leave. He has refused to leave.*

911 Operator: *Have you informed the man that he is trespassing?*

Response: *Yes. (Police will need to know that you have told the man that he is trespassing before they can escort him off library property.)*

911 Operator: *Asks for address and call back number. Informs you that the police is in route.*

#### Role Playing: Refusal to Leave Part 2

A patron browsing the shelves without a mask on. Following the Code 1 Framework, staff empathize and offer him a free mask, or to accommodate any of his needs at curbside. He not only refuses the accommodations, but yells and causes a disturbance in the building. He refuses to leave.

**Possible Response:** The patron is now legally trespassing because he has been asked to leave and has refused. Inform the patron that he is trespassing and the police will be called. Call the police.

**911 Operator:** *What is the nature of your emergency?*

**Response:** A man has verbally harassed our staff and has been asked to leave. He has refused to leave.

**911 Operator:** Have you informed the man that he is trespassing?

**Response:** Yes. (Police will need to know that you have told the man that he is trespassing before they can escort him off library property.)

**911 Operator:** Asks for address and call back number. Informs you that the police are in route.

## Code 3: Sexual Harassment

### Purpose:

Although rare, you may occasionally encounter sexual harassment or unwanted sexual advances in the library. When someone continues to behave inappropriately toward you after being told to stop, they are harassing you. Staff are empowered to put an immediate stop to this kind of treatment.

### Guidelines:

#### 1. Assess danger or harm to staff and patrons

If someone makes unwanted sexual advances toward you (whether it is verbal or physical), you are empowered to tell them to stop. **If they continue after being told to stop, they are harassing you.**

#### 2. Remain calm and assertive

Your level of assertiveness should match their level of aggressiveness. Make it clear that their behavior is unacceptable to you. Directness sometimes feels rude; this is a time for directness. If you feel that you cannot make this statement yourself, get your manager or another staff member to assist you.

#### 3. Enforce boundaries

Inform them of the consequences of continuing to treat you this way:

- *If you continue to say inappropriate things to me, I will ask you to leave the library.*
- *Let go of my arm. If you do not let go, I will yell for my coworkers.*

#### 4. Afterward regroup

After the incident is over, step away from the desk. Breathe deeply. Debrief with your manager or a colleague. Write an incident report.

## Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 1

A patron is waiting in line that always makes uncomfortable comments about your appearance when you help him. The last time he was in, you told him firmly, "I do not discuss my personal appearance. Please do not say things like that to me again." When the patron arrives at the front of the line, he grins and says, "You're wearing my favorite shirt again. It makes you look so sexy!"

**Possible response:** You have already told him that this behavior is inappropriate, so by ignoring your request, he is harassing you. Be very firm and direct to ensure that he gets the message; list some possible consequences that will occur if he harasses you again.

*I have asked you not to say that kind of thing to me. I need you to stop talking to me that way. If you continue to say inappropriate things to me, I will need to tell you to leave the library.*

Once the patron has left the desk, ask a coworker to take over so that you can take some time to calm down. Write up an incident report. Debrief with your manager if they're onsite.

## Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 2

You are out in the stacks shelving books. A familiar patron comes up to you. You greet her and offer to assist her. She immediately talks about how much she enjoys seeing you every visit. You make a general comment that staff enjoy getting to know library regulars like her. Again, you ask her if there is anything you can help her find. She steps closer and reaches up to tuck some hair behind your ear, before asking you when your shift ends so you can get to know each other better.

**Possible response:** While you may feel comfortable dealing with this advance as you would a Code 2 (see Sexual or Personal Advances), any time a patron touches you, you are fully within your rights to immediately tell them to stop and back off.

*Please don't touch me. I am not interested in knowing you that way. This conversation is finished.*

OR

*I am not comfortable being touched. Please don't do it again.*

If she persists in touching you, you should tell her to leave for the day. Then find another staff member, inform them of the situation, and follow procedures to ensure she leaves. Once she is gone, fill out an incident report and speak with your manager about the situation.

## Sexual Harassment: Role Playing Part 3

You are cleaning up the community room after storytime when a parent comes back in the room. Before you realize it, he has you cornered and grabs you.

**Possible response:** You have the right to defend yourself against harm. Do what you can to free yourself, but at the same time, yell for help. If you think a coworker might be near, call for them by name. Regardless, making noise will likely attract attention and may scare him off.

Once you are free, you should find other people immediately and call 911. The patron will likely not wait around for the police, but you should make a police report and provide a description. Follow up with your manager and fill out an incident report.