

# Kent District Library

## Complaint Response Manual



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# KDL Way 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 issue or complaint 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 KDL 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.**

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# Code 1: Noise Complaints

## What does a noise complaint look like in the library?

In the course of your employment at KDL, you will, at times, be approached with a noise complaint or feel that, in your professional judgement, a patron is being too loud for the space.

### 1. 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 judgment aside.

### 2. 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. KDL's philosophy is that 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 judgment and be pleased that the patron is using and (often) enjoying the space.

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

KDL does not guarantee the quiet spaces that are traditionally associated with libraries, but KDL does strive to accommodate patrons who wish to use the space for the more traditional purposes of reading and study.

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

It's important to know that KDL does not consider 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. Below are a few options to consider:



Are there quiet spaces in the Branch?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Study Rooms</li><li>•Programming Rooms</li><li>•Study carrels</li></ul>
Are there quieter times in the library?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•School hours</li><li>•Non-programming hours</li></ul>
Do you have any noise reducers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Noise-cancelling headphones</li><li>•Laptops</li></ul>
Do you have branch-specific solutions?	

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## Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron is involved in a conversation and her voice is carrying through the building. Other patrons are glancing between you and the patron, clearly 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's 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 study room (programming room, alcove, etc), and then you won't need to worry about it at all.*

**Scenario 2:** Two or more kids or teens are playing computer games together and talking loudly about the game. In your opinion, this creates a disturbance for the patron at the computer nearby who is clearly trying to concentrate.

**Possible Response:** Kids *definitely* don't care about the noise they are making! The noise might even make the game more fun for them. In this case, it's a clear case of the rock meeting the hard place. You want the kids to enjoy the space, AND you don't want their enjoyment to ruin the space for others. You probably are going to have to let them know that you are going to need them to work harder at being quiet. If noise is the only complaint (no swearing or insults to others), they may need to be periodically reminded to be quiet, and that's okay.

*Hey, it sounds like you are having a good time! I know it's easy to get lost in the game, but if you are going to keep playing, we'll need you to keep the volume down." If you are getting patron complaints, you may want to consider terminating the child's/teen's computer session. Give the child or teen a warning that this is a possibility prior to terminating the session.*

**Scenario 3:** On a busy storytime morning, a patron approaches you to say that libraries are supposed to be quiet places!

**Possible Response:** Now, in this case, we can't really move or address the noisemakers because the noisemakers are EVERYWHERE! So what can we offer the patron?

*A rationale for our busy storytime days:* Yes, in the past the library was a quiet place, but this has changed over the last decade. People use the library differently now. We love it that caregivers can bring their kids on a fun field trip to the library.

*Empathy:* Sometimes patrons just want you to know that they have noticed that things are wild and crazy and NOT like they were back in the day.

*A solution:* This is where the problem solving comes in. You can say: These storytime days are amazing, but they are also a little CRAZY. Do you need a quieter space this morning? *Let me see how I can help.*

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# Code 1: Unaccompanied Children

## What does this look like in the library?

Parents come in all shapes and sizes and have different instincts and cultural expectations. During your employment with KDL, you will meet parents who seem to hover over their children, and you will meet those who let their (even young) children wander through the building and away from their sight. Tearful children may wander or approach the desk asking for their parent. Other children may dash for the door the second their parent's attention wanders.

### 1. Frame Your Response

You can choose how you look at these situations. Your first instinct may be to be irritated with the parent or judge them to be neglectful. Try to set this judgment aside.

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

We have all likely had the experience of being lost. Remember how that feels. In these situations, KDL's primary focus is on making sure kids **feel** safe and **are** safe. Keep this objective in mind rather than focusing on whether the person is a good parent.

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

We want visiting the library to be a positive experience for children. When children lose track of their adult, it can be very frightening for them. We also want to minimize instances in which children wander out the door on their own (something that happens more often than you would think). KDL asks adults who bring children under 3 with them to always keep their children within sight so these things don't happen.

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

If you see a wandering child, move to their side and ask them who brought them to the library. Guide the child to search for their adult. Let the adult know that the child was looking for them.

In most cases this will take care of the situation. If you need to return a child a second time, make sure to take time to share the above rationale and expectation.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A mother is deeply involved in a discussion with two other mothers. Her 3-year-old child has gone from playing in KDLville to standing behind you at the desk.

**Possible Response:** Children are **fast** and moms need adult company sometimes. Take the child's hand and guide them back to their mom. Think about saying something like:

*Hey! I think you've got a future sprinter on your hands here. I wish I could move that fast! He was trying to do my work over by the desk.*

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**Scenario 2:** A father is sitting in KDLville and is talking on his cell phone. His 4-year-old son has moved out of sight and to the other side of the library and is interacting with a visiting school group. One of the school chaperones expresses concern that the child is unattended. You return the child to his father, who asks why you are returning him, saying, “Was he misbehaving?” He seems annoyed that you have intervened.

**Possible Response:** The issue here is largely that the child is joining a group that doesn’t need any additions. Think about saying something like:

*No, but he was joining a group of first graders on their field trip, and we don’t want him sneaking out with them!*

**Scenario 3:** A family with is sitting in KDLville. One of their small children is climbing up a bookshelf. Another of the children is repeatedly slamming the miniature door to the program room. The parents make no move to intervene. You are concerned (in addition to the noise) about the potential for injury.

**Possible Response:** Here we will need to step in and call the safety risks to their attention. Perhaps by saying something like:

*Hi! We’ve had hurt fingers from slamming doors. Let’s see if there is something else that would be fun to do. Try to draw the child’s attention to another feature of KDLville and try to move a chair or something else in front of the door.*

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# Code 1: Emotional Dependence on Staff

## What does emotional dependence on staff look like in the library?

For some patrons, the library is their only contact with the outside world. For these patrons, the library computers and materials are a draw, but the sense of community is the main purpose of their visits. These are the patrons who stop by the desk to tell you about their busy day or about the book they are waiting to receive. These patrons develop a sense of attachment to the faces they see every day. At times they linger at the desk for a long time sharing very personal information.

### 1. Frame Your Response

When we are at the desk or doing walkabout, our job is to assist our patrons. Short periods of conversation with patrons are included in this assistance. These conversations build relationships and are encouraged. Time with patrons becomes a problem *only* when interactions with other patrons are impacted (you can't help others) or when the patron makes you uncomfortable by becoming overly familiar (wants to know about your politics or your family members).

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

When you feel like the patron is starting to affect your ability to help other patrons, try the following: be up front with them, thank them for the opportunity to get to know them better, and explain that you have work to do.

*"Elaine, it has been a pleasure talking to you, but unfortunately, I need to..."*

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

The KDL Way charges us to interact with our patrons with kindness and empathy. The balance between kindness and empathy and maintaining your own privacy and comfort is a delicate one. Staff are encouraged to gently enforce personal boundaries.

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

In most of these instances, the key to handling them is to politely excuse yourself from the situation. Leaving the desk and returning in a few minutes will generally result in the patron moving on.

Also, a good general rule is to approach patrons with a friendly reserve until you get to know them better. Consider ahead of time how much personal information you wish to share with patrons. You are under no obligation to share information about your family, friends or hobbies, but consider what you might be willing to share without it feeling intrusive to you.

Finally, staff should never share personal information about coworkers, even when the patron seems kind and harmless. If someone asks personal questions about your coworker, offer a kind but firm response: *Elaine, I'm sorry, but I can't give out personal information about coworkers.;*

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## Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron is very upset about the current political climate and voices her objections to some piece of current scandal. The patron ends her statements repeatedly with, “Don’t you think?”

**Possible Responses:** There are a couple of ways you could handle this:

- Divert the patron’s attention with a neutral statement like: *Politics is a complicated business, that is for sure!*
- Make KDL the “fall guy”: *I understand what you are saying, but we are really not allowed to talk politics on the job.*
- Bring it back to library-related tasks: *“I’d be happy to try to find you a book on that topic, if you are interested.”*

**Scenario 2:** A patron lingers at the desk telling you about his favorite author, discussing each of the different series the author writes as well as which series is his favorite. He tells you about the time he met the author at a book signing and what the author said to him about his writing process. The patron talks about the novel he is writing. No one is waiting at the desk, but you feel it is unlikely anyone will approach the desk if the patron remains.

**Possible Response:** This is definitely a good scenario in which to excuse yourself to go to the back room. Thank the patron for sharing this story and then gently remind them that you need to continue working. Also, keep an eye out for your coworkers. If you see this happening to one of them, send them a message or call their extension and ask them to help you with something in the back room.

*Statements you can make that will create a break in the conversation:*

- *“I need to run to the back room for a minute.”*
- *“I need to grab a book for another patron who is coming to pick it up.”*
- *“It’s been fun chatting, but I really need to go in the back and return a phone call.”*

**Scenario 3:** A patron approaches you and addresses you by name. “Hi, Jane! You look so familiar. I feel like I know you. Where do live?”

**Possible Response:** Feel free to answer *around* the question. This essentially distracts the patron from their original question. For example:

*You know, I think I just have one of those faces! I don’t live around here, but I’ve always been a Michigander.*

If the patron persists in their questioning and makes you feel uncomfortable, direct things back to a library-related topic. For example:

*I’m afraid you don’t look at all familiar to me, but that doesn’t prevent me from helping you today! Is there anything that I can help you find?*

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# Code 1: Technical dependence on Staff

## What does technical dependence on staff look like in the library?

For some patrons, the digital revolution has been a trial, not a triumph. These are the patrons who struggle to use the mouse, find the internet, retain their email passwords, download their ebooks, digitally apply for jobs, or complete paperwork online. These individuals frequently come to the staff and explain that they do not know how to use the computer. You may get them started on their task, but they come to the desk frequently or wave staff over repeatedly as they attempt to complete the work they have come to do.

### 1. Frame Your Response

When we are at the desk or doing walkabout, our job is to assist our patrons. Helping a patron repeatedly is not taking you away from the job, it *is* the job. Having said that, it is not always possible to sit with a patron for an extended period of time to help them complete their work. Attempts to reduce this technical dependence have been made through tech tutoring appointments, but many of the tasks cannot wait until an appointment can be set up. They need to be addressed now. In these situations, assess the urgency and assess your resources before moving forward.

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

Try to help the patron as much as you can, but explain that if other patrons need help, you need to be available for them, too. If you are unable to provide the assistance they need, consider what accommodations you can offer.

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

Patrons who are not technically literate have very few places to go for help. Many KDL staff have been told by patrons that the Apple Store or Best Buy have referred them to the library rather than assist them. Technology classes are not very helpful to the patron because they have limited opportunity to ask specific questions and because these patrons have difficulty transferring skills from application to application. We are, for many, their last resort.

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

Be honest with the patron. If it is a busy night at the desk, let them know what level of attention you are likely to be able to give them. If necessary, inform them of times in which the library is generally less busy.

If you are fully staffed or other information staff are available off desk, consider doing an impromptu tech tutoring time. Being proactive about making time for the patron will lessen what might become annoyance at being called back to the patron's computer repeatedly.

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## Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** An older patron comes to the desk and tells you that they know very little about computers but need help filling out a travel visa application. You help them get on the computer and find the appropriate site. The patron has difficulty using the mouse and repeatedly calls you over to the computer to assist with routine portions of the form. What do you do?

### Possible Responses:

- Ask the patron if they have a friend or family member who would be available to help sit with them as they fill out the form. If the answer is no:
- "You know, we do have one-on-one technology tutoring here at the library. I'm going to be off-desk in about 30 minutes. If you can continue working on this on your own until then, I have about 20 minutes available to assist you with this. If we can't finish this during that time frame, perhaps we can set up a formal one-on-one session."

**Scenario 2:** A patron is experiencing difficulty filling out an online application. The form is legitimately confusing. The patron grows more agitated as time passes and says, several times, "I have to get this submitted today!" What do you do?

### Possible Responses:

- *"I'm sorry. I'm not sure what kind of information they are asking for either. I do see a phone number for the company. Do you have a cell phone that you could use to call for more information?"*
- *"You know, I'm not sure what they need either. Let me ask my coworker if they have seen that question before."*
- *"We have tried all of our normal tricks for applications, but it doesn't seem to be working. I see that you had the website for this application written down. Who provided you with this link? Is that individual available for you to call for assistance? If you can get an answer to this question, we might be able to assist you with any other issues."*

**Scenario 3:** A patron is applying for unemployment and needs to fill out the online form and upload past pay stubs. The patron is having difficulty entering the information, and the nature of the information is sensitive (it includes their social security number and their past earnings). You feel uncomfortable helping to enter this information and wonder if you might ever be accused of misusing the information. What do you do?

**Possible Responses:**

- Make a point of looking away when they enter passwords or other private information.
- When applicable, help them turn OFF any password reveal icon for this kind of information and explain the importance of using it in a public computer lab.
- Acknowledge your concerns to them: “I’m glad I’ve been able to help you get started with this, but I know a lot of this personal information is pretty sensitive. While I certainly want to help you, I also don’t want to violate your privacy either.” Usually, patrons will respond with “Oh, I trust you!” or “I’m not worried about that; I just really need help with this.” If they seem concerned about privacy, ask, “What would be the best way to assist you with this?”

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# Code 1: Patron Hygiene Complaints

## What is considered offensive odor in the library?

KDL's Library Customer Responsibilities defines offensive odor, as - including, but not limited to - odor due to poor personal hygiene or overpowering perfume or cologne that causes a nuisance.

## What other hygiene complaints might we receive in the library?

Another issue we sometimes encounter is a patron who has visible lice or other bugs on their body, clothes, or belongings.

### 1. 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.

### 2. 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.

### 3. 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. Also, some patrons and staff have allergies or sensitivities to perfume and may feel physically sick when confronted by very strong perfumes. Visible bugs are not just an issue of comfort, but a health issue, as lice can be spread from person to person.

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

If a patron's odor is so strong that it is overwhelming the space, or in the case of visible lice, 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 either patron?** Ask the patron to move to a more isolated area of the library. Offer to switch the patron complaining to another computer or table, or offer them a quiet study room if there is one available.

**Does the patron have access to a shower?** Offer to refer the patron to a organization where they can bathe, wash their clothes or obtain personal hygiene supplies. This not only can resolve the issue but can connect the patron to resources they need.

If a patron's perfume is so strong that it is overwhelming the space, consider offering them an alcohol wipe to remove some of the perfume. All branches should have wipes in their first aid kits.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron approaches the reference desk and complains that the person next to them "stinks." While you can detect some odor, the body odor, is not, in your opinion, very strong.

**Possible Response:** What is considered bad body odor can be subjective. What seems normal to one person, may be almost unbearable for another. In this case, try to find an accommodation that works for both patrons. Offer to move the complaining patron to another computer.

*I'm so sorry this is making it difficult for you to use the computer. You might not have realized (they're kind of out of sight!), but we have another row of computers on the other side of the library. I could help you get logged into one of those. Would that work for you?*

**Scenario 2:** 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 embarrassments. 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! Can I speak to you over there for a moment? I hate to have to say this, but we've had a complaint about odor in the computer area. I wonder if something might have gotten on your clothes? I apologize for the inconvenience, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave until you can address the issue. If it would help, I can give you the contact to an organization that helps provide people with safe places to clean their clothes and bathe.*

**Scenario 3:** A teen removed a bottle of perfume from her backpack and gave herself several spritzes. A patron sitting at a table near her is having a sneezing fit, another has complained and the teen appears to be considering giving herself another spray.

**Possible Response:** The library is about to be enveloped in a cloud of perfume, and it's time to act! Approach the teen privately. Address the patron by name if you know it, and compliment her on her perfume, then explain that there are people in the library with sensitivities to perfume. Offer her a few alcohol wipes to remove the perfume.

*Hi, \*Name\* I love your perfume; vanilla scented perfume is my favorite! However, a few people in the library are really sensitive to perfume, and it's making them feel sick. Could you please stop spraying the perfume? If it's not too much to ask, would you use these wipes to remove a bit of the perfume? Thank you for being so understanding!*

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**Scenario 4:** Several families are playing together in KDLville. One of the patrons approaches and quietly informs you that she can see visible lice in the hair of one of the children.

**Possible Response:** As this is a health issue, and the lice can spread to other children, we will need to speak to the parent, and ask that the child leave the library until the issue is resolved. Try to have this conversation as privately as possible, even if it is just stepping a few steps away from the other parents, so that the parent of the child can still see their child.

*Excuse me, could we speak over here for a moment? We won't get to far away, I know that you want to be able to keep your little guy in sight! We've noticed that your child has visible lice. This is a public space, where many children play together, and there is a high chance of spreading the lice in this environment. I'm sorry to say this, but I'm going to have to ask you and your child to leave until the issue is taken care of. I'm happy to help you find resources to help you address the issue if you would like. Thank you for understanding.*

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# Code 1: Animals in the Library

## What does this look like in the library?

It is becoming more common to see service and therapy animals brought into public buildings, including the library. KDL policy allows for service animals, and in practice, we do not turn away animals that are identified by owners as therapy animals.

### 1. Frame Your Response

Stay proactive and positive. You can choose how you look at these situations. Your first instinct may be to be irritated with the patron. Try to set this judgment aside.

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

Assume the best. Consider if there is a reason that the patron has the animal in the library. Review the KDL policy on service animals [here](#).

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

While we may be able to turn away patrons who bring in animals that are not service animals, we may choose not to do so. KDL wants our communities to enjoy the library spaces to the fullest, which sometimes includes the presence of animals. This is tolerated so long as the animal is not disruptive to other patrons in any way.

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

Approach the patron with a friendly smile and initiate this type of interaction:

*Hi! What's your animal's name? Just so you know, we allow service and therapy animals in the library as long as they are not being disruptive.*

Phrasing it in this way allows the patron to know that the expectation is that the animal is a service animal, and also alerts the patron that we do reserve the right to limit their use of the library if the animal causes problems.

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# Code 1: Patron with Hearing Impairment

## Purpose:

If a patron is hard of hearing, or deaf, it may feel challenging to make sure that patron feels their complaints are listened to and taken care of. The following framework will help you feel you have the tools to help.

## Guidelines:

### 1. Frame Your Response

Stay proactive and positive. Take a moment to think through your communication options.

- Many people with hearing impairments have lip reading (also called speechreading) abilities. Make sure you are facing the person you are helping. If the patron has limited hearing, this will also help them to hear you better.
- Keep a pen and paper handy at all service points. Writing is an excellent way to communicate with patrons with hearing impairments.
- Do you have staff members working who know sign language?
- If the patron with hearing impairments comes with another patron, make sure you are speaking directly to the person you are helping. Talking about the person with hearing impairments as if they are not there can seem at best dismissive, and at worst rude and uncaring.

### 2. Empathize

Patrons who are having difficulty communicating their needs because of hearing impairments may feel frustrated. Do your best to show that you care and want to help them.

### 3. Give a rationale

You may need to give your rationale in writing if it is difficult to clearly communicate another way. Otherwise, follow the framework in the same way.

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

As with the rationale, the only difference here is the mode of communication. Use your best judgment to offer an accommodation or alternative. In case of disruptive behavior, boundary choices should be given.

***Scenario 1:*** A regular patron comes in the library for the first time in several weeks and hands you her card. You greet her by name, as you typically would, and comment that you haven't seen her in a while. She seems to not hear you and asks you to repeat yourself.

**Possible Response:** Looking directly at the patron, repeat yourself more loudly and clearly.

You: *Hi Diane, it is good to see you! I haven't seen you in the library recently.*

Diane: *Oh, I've been in the hospital. I had an ear infection and they think it may have permanently damaged my hearing. All my books are late and I have to pay the fine. I'm afraid the fines will be a lot, and I don't have a lot of money right now with the hospital bills.*

You: *I'm so sorry this has happened! You shouldn't have to worry about library fines with so much going on in your life right now. I will take those fines off your account!*

**Scenario 2:** A patron walks into the library, and you can tell right away that she's pretty upset. You greet her and ask if you can help, but she just shakes her head, holds her hand out flat and makes a motion as if she is writing on her hand with an imaginary pen.

**Possible Response:** This is a common signal that the person would like pen and paper. Get pen and paper.

Patron in writing: I just went to another library and they said I had to come here and get a card! I just want to check out a book for my book club!

Continue this transaction exactly as you normally would, substituting writing for speaking.

**Scenario 3:** A patron comes up to the desk with a note. The note says: "You've got to watch out for that guy in yellow, he's a felon."

**Possible Response:**

You (in writing): *Is he doing anything illegal, or anything you are concerned about right now?*

Patron: *No, but he's bad news.*

You (in writing): *The library is a welcoming environment for everyone, as long as they are not currently breaking the law.*

*He stands in front of you writing furiously and produces a several paragraph long rant about the other patron including profanity. Nothing indicates the patron is currently doing anything illegal.*

This situation has escalated to Code 2. Use the Code 2 Framework to respond, only respond in writing. Give him an out, and ask him to stop.

You (in writing): *We know you are trying to help us, but please refrain from judging our patrons, or giving us unsolicited information about them, unless an emergency is happening at the moment.*

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# Code 1: Language Barrier

## **Purpose:**

Sometimes communication with a patron is complicated due to a language barrier. This can be frustrating for both patrons and staff. However, there are tools available to help those who don't speak a shared language communicate.

## **Guidelines:**

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

Stay proactive and positive. Take a moment to think through your communication options.

- Do you speak a few words of the patron's native language? Sometimes that's enough. In our experience, patrons are usually grateful that you tried to speak their language, and very forgiving of mistakes, as many of them are trying to learn another language themselves!
- Does your branch have a staff member who is bilingual or learning the language? Is there a bilingual staff member working in Patron Services?
- Many excellent translation resources exist online, including Google translate. Consider using a desk computer, or a staff iPad to communicate. If you download the google translate app to your iPad you can speak in English and it will translate into another spoken language. 32 languages are included.

### **2. Empathize**

Patrons who are having difficulty communicating their needs because of a language barrier may feel frustrated. Do your best to show that you care and want to help them. When a patron can't understand your words, your tone of voice and body language become important communication tools, especially when communicating compassion, friendliness, or apology.

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

Only your method of giving your rationale changes when communicating through a language barrier. Your rationale will depend on the situation.

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

As with the rationale, the only difference here is the mode of communication. Use your best judgment to offer an accommodation or alternative. In case of disruptive behavior, boundary choices should be given.

**Scenario 1:** A mother and her child come up to the desk. The mother looks down at her son, and says something quickly in Spanish, glancing between you and her son. You pick up a few words: it's something about a book. The son looks at you, and says his mom got a message on her phone that a book was late, but he gave it back last week.

**Possible Response:** It may seem logical to address only the boy who is speaking. However, it is important to make sure that you acknowledge both patrons when you reply. Look at them when they are speaking, and use positive body language to convey that you care. The meaning of your words may not come through, but the tone of your voice will. You may need to pause for the son to translate.

You: *I'm so sorry about that! Do you have your card so I can check your account?*

The son translates to his mom and give you the card. You scan it in, and check the account.

You: *Is this the book that you turned in? Pause for translation. We're not perfect and check in hundreds of books every day and it's possible we may have missed it while checking in. Let me go check to see if it is here. Pause, and check the shelf. You find the book. I'm so sorry, I've fixed the problem and checked it in without any fines! Pause. The mother smiles and looks relieved when her son translates.*

**Scenario 2:** You greet a regular patron as he enters the library with his young daughter. He is working hard to learn English and talks with staff cheerfully all the time, though his English is limited. He sits down in a chair while in KDLville while his daughter plays nearby. He working on his laptop while she plays. A few minutes later, you notice that his daughter has bolted and has pulled two shelves of books off the shelf and on to the floor.

**Possible Response:** Toddlers are fast, and can get into mischief in no time fast! Approach the father as you normally would, and kindly alert him to his daughter's behavior. If the daughter is within site, gesture towards her as you speak, using non-threatening body language, palm flat and facing up, as pointing is seen as unfriendly in many cultures. This way he can see the problem for himself, even if he doesn't understand every word you say. If you know the daughter's name, use it. This will at least alert him that he doesn't know where she is if she is not in sight.

*Hi \_\_\_\_\_, you may not have noticed but \_\_\_\_\_ has gotten away from you. Gesture toward her, or in the direction she has gone. I don't want her to pull down something heavy and get hurt! Most parents will rush off to grab their mischievous offspring at this point!*

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# Code 1: Patron Out of Service Area

**A patron is out of our service area and will have to go to another library to get a library card.**

A patron is new to the area. You've checked, and they don't live in our service area, and have no records of a library card in a nearby system and do not live in GRPL's service area either. As much as you would like to immediately provide the patron in front of you with a library card, if the patron does not live in our service area, he or she will need to visit their library of residence before they can check out materials at KDL.

## 1. Frame Your Response

### Stay Positive

- Try to stay positive and not get stuck on what you can't do (issue a library card). Many of our services are available for anyone who comes into the library, whether they have a card or not.

### Be proactive

- When a patron approaches the desk try to find out what the patron is hoping to accomplish at the library first, even before you begin the process of seeing if you can issue a library card. The patron may not need a library card to do it. They may be in a hurry and grateful they don't have to take the time today to get a card.
- When possible, check the patron's ID before the patron starts filling out an application. The patron then doesn't feel they wasted time filling out an application for nothing.
- If your library is nearby other library systems, consider having bookmarks or handouts with neighboring libraries, hours, locations and contact information ready to hand out.

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

Patrons are often frustrated and angry when they find out they have to go to another library to get their card. They may have made a special trip, we are their closest library geographically, and they have already spent half an hour with their family selecting just the right books and DVDs. They're excited and looking forward to reading and watching their choices, and you've just told them they can't take them home. Of course they're disappointed!

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

We want everyone who enters our library to know we care about them, and want to help them, regardless of where they live.

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

You've asked all the questions. The patron just wants to check out the books in front of them, and since they don't have a library card they can't. What can you do?

- Offer to hold the materials they have chosen so they can pick them up later, once they have gotten their card.
- If your friends group and/or manager are okay with it, offer to let them choose a free book from the book sale. They can take something home to read, (or a book to take on the vacation they are leaving for in two hours). This is especially helpful for kids, who often just don't understand all this business about library cards.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A smiling family of four approaches the desk with a huge stack of books and DVDs. One of the juveniles tells you excitedly that he is here to get his very first library card. The family are regulars, and you have a sneaking suspicion that they have a Muskegon Library card.

**Possible Response:** It is very common for patrons who have had library cards for years to forget where they initially got their library card, and frequently they've forgotten they didn't get it at KDL. For many families having the responsibility of your very own library card is a huge event. If the parent already has a card, offer to check out the books on the parent's card for now. Think what you can offer the child to make it seem a bit less of a blow.

*I can see how excited you are about getting your library card. I'm sorry we can't get you one right now. However, when you get your card from Ravenna you can use it here, just like Mom. It's hard to wait longer for something you've been waiting for so long. If it's okay with mom, would you like to pick out a piece of chocolate, and a free book from our book sale? Great! See you soon!*

**Scenario 2:** A patron walks into the library, and you can tell right away that she's pretty upset. When you ask if you can help her, she tells you she's been to another library system and was told she had to come to KDL to get a library card as she lives in our service area. She just wants to check out a book for her book club, and she only has two days to read it. When you check her card, you realize that she does not live in our service area and will need to go to a third library system to get her card.

**Possible Response:** The boundaries between library systems can be very confusing, and sometimes, even libraries make mistakes. Now you're in the unenviable position of telling this patron that she will have to go to yet another library to get her card.

*I am so sorry that you've spent your morning driving between libraries, and that it's been so frustrating for you to get a card. Unfortunately, after checking your address, I see that you live in Muskegon County. This means you will have to go to a Muskegon Public Library to get your card. I know that you've already been to more than one library today, so I'm going to call the nearest Muskegon Branch Library and ask them to verify you are within their service area. If you tell me what book you need for your book club, I can also check to see if they have it and can pull it for you. They will be expecting you, and hopefully that will make the process go a bit more quickly. We have a bookmark with a map, and their hours and contact information if you don't have time to make it today. I can only say how sorry I am this has been so difficult for you.*

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# Code 2 KDL Way 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.**

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## Code 2: Challenging Library Materials

### **What does it look like when a patron challenges library materials?**

When patrons challenge the appropriateness of library materials, they are often very emotional or upset. Frequently, the patron will express disapproval that the item(s) were purchased with taxpayer money, or that they were displayed where children might find them. They may express that such materials would be harmful to children to view or that the content should be identifiable so that parents will know to avoid them. At times patrons may worry that content from a particular perspective will be misleading to the public. Examples include:

- Books with sexual content (particularly if there are explicit covers)
- Books with LGBTQ characters, particularly in the children's section
- Books with curse words in the titles
- Books with controversial topics (politics, evolution/creationism, etc.)

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

As a library staff member it's important appear neutral, even if the patrons behavior makes you angry or you deeply disagree with the patron's point of view. Explain to them that KDL provides materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. We do not make value judgments on the points of view, and we certainly support their right not to check something out because it is objectionable to them.

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

Avoid embarrassing the patron(s). You may provide them with a copy of the Library Bill of Rights, which is located at the bottom of this page. If their frustration continues, let them know that KDL has a process for [challenging library materials](#). In order to fill out this form, which is then reviewed by our Challenged Materials Committee, the patron must have read, heard or viewed the entire work. The form asks them to articulate their objection(s) to the material.

### **3. Ask them to stop**

Generally, offering them the opportunity to fill out the Challenged Materials Form will bring an end to the conversation. Most patrons will walk away without filling out the form. A few will take the form with them or fill it out at the library. If the patron will not stop discussing the issue, you may firmly tell them that you have explained the process to them and there is no other option for you to offer them. Ask them if they would like the manager to follow up with them. Give them your manager's card if that is the case.

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## Code 2: Unruly, aggressive or bullying behavior toward other patrons or staff

### What does unruly, aggressive or bullying behavior toward other patrons or staff member look like in the library?

Unruly, aggressive or bullying behavior occurs when a patron is being abusive or aggressive toward another patron, when two or more patrons become upset with each other and begin to argue audibly or when a frustrated patron begins to become aggressive. Often times this looks like teens calling one another names and instigating other teens to the point where the group becomes upset. It can also look like two adult patrons arguing over something or a person treating another aggressively, including staff.

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

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

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

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.

#### 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.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** While working on the computers, a male guardian is insulting and disparaging a woman who appears to have an impairment.

**Possible Response:** Hello, Sir. My name is Mary, and I work here at the library. I know that helping others with computers can be super frustrating but the way you're speaking to Maria is making me uncomfortable. We want this to be a friendly and comfortable space for everybody, so I have to ask you to speak more gently.

**Scenario 2:** While sitting in the teen area after school, a teen boy turns to another who had just walked into the area. "How do you feel about violence?" The tone did not seem to be aggressive, but the teen boy he addressed was clearly taken aback. When a nearby staff member asks the first teen why he had said that, he replies, "it's a song, I was asking how he felt about it." As the two are not friends, the staff member suspects this may be bullying behavior.

**Possible Response:** Consider saying: Blake, I understand that you were asking about a song, but asking someone out of the blue how they feel about violence can be alarming when we don't know what you mean. We want people to feel safe in the library, so please choose your words with more care.

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**Scenario 3:** A regular elderly patron needs help on the computer and can't seem to master what the library staff member is trying to teach them. The patron becomes upset and calls the staff member an "incompetent idiot."

**Possible Response:** Norma, I understand that this is frustrating to you and I'm trying to help the best I can. You may have called me names out of frustration, but I'm going to have to ask you to stop calling me names and proceed in a kinder manner. If you can't do that, I will have to stop assisting you.

**Scenario 4:** A mother and her daughter are waiting for an older daughter to be done with tutoring. The younger daughter is running around and singing. Another patron on the computers begins shushing the child and telling her to be quiet. The mother tells the patron she doesn't have to be so mean. The patron then tells the mother she should be a better parent.

**Possible Response:** *Be firm and direct.* "I'm sorry. This is obviously an uncomfortable situation. I cannot allow you to talk to one another like that in the library. If you wish, I can move you to a different computer a little farther away."

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# Code 2: Drinking or Intoxicated Patron

## What does this look like in the library?

Occasionally, people may choose to come to the library while drinking alcohol or being intoxicated. The consumption of alcohol is prohibited unless at a library-sanctioned event. If staff are made aware of the presence of alcohol, they may have to intervene. In addition, if a patron's behavior is confused, belligerent or disruptive, or if they lose control of their bodily functions, they may need to leave the library.

### 1. Remain calm and be kindly assertive

The patron may not realize that drinking at the library is against our policy, so be prepared to share the policy with them.

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

Avoid embarrassing the patron by indicating that they may not have been aware of the policy. If possible, speak with them in a place where others cannot overhear. This has the additional benefit of not upsetting other patrons who may act judgmental toward someone drinking in a public place. Examples of outs: I'm sure you were unaware of our policy, but...

### 3. Ask them to stop

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

**NOTE: If patrons become defensive or aggressive, move to Code 3 Response Framework.**

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## Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron sneaking a drink from a bottle in his coat every so often. The bottle is clearly some kind of alcohol.

**Possible Response:** *Hi! Would you speak with me over here for a minute? Thanks. I couldn't help but notice that you were enjoying some refreshment while you were over there. I am sure you were unaware, but the city does not allow [insert city policy]. And in the future, please refrain from bringing alcohol inside the library.*

**Scenario 2:** Several patrons come into the library and complain that there is a woman sitting outside on the library patio drinking a beer. She has the rest of a six-pack sitting at her feet.

**Possible Response:** *Hi! You may not have realized this, but this patio is part of the KDL facility. We are really happy to see you making use of the area, but unfortunately, our policies don't allow open alcoholic beverage containers here. I have to ask you to leave while you have that with you, but I hope you come back to enjoy this area again when you don't have alcohol with you.*

---

**Scenario 3:** A patron enters the library and as you greet him, you notice that he seems to be staggering a little bit. When you ask him if he is okay, he assures you that he is fine. Later when you are doing walkabout, you see him in a chair sleeping. You wake him up and ask him if he is okay. He wakes up slowly and mutters, “Yeah, I’m fine.” His head immediately sags back to the same position. You wake him again, and he waves his arm at you and slurs something unintelligible.

**Possible Response:** While he may exhibit signs of intoxication, you are concerned for his safety first and foremost. Because this has become a safety issue, you realize that this is a Code 3 situation. Consider helping him contact someone for a ride. If he is unable to call someone himself (or give you contact information), you may need to call 911 or the non-emergency number for medical or safety assistance.

**Scenario 4:** Situations where a patron is drinking and/or intoxicated can quickly escalate from a Code 2 to an emergency medical situation. Consider the above example with a slightly different outcome. A patron enters the library and as you greet him, you notice that he seems to be staggering a little bit. When you ask him if he is okay, he assures you that he is fine. Later when you are doing walkabout, you see him in a chair sleeping. When you try to wake him, he is unresponsive and seems to be struggling to breathe.

**Possible Response:** While it started out as a Code 2, it has now escalated to a medical emergency. The patron’s safety and your safety should be your priority. Call 911 or direct another staff member to do so. If you feel comfortable doing so, administer aid.

All KDL locations have an AED and Narcan. All staff have been certified in First Aid and the use of the AED (or will be in the next series of training after they are hired). A short training on administering Narcan is available here: <https://vimeo.com/209234988>. This training is offered so that you have the knowledge to offer aid if you chose to.

Offering aid is your choice, and you should always keep your safety in mind. For example, a person who has had Narcan administered may wake up disoriented, confused and possibly even angry. If the patron becomes agitated or angry, back up and give them space. Make sure you have called 911, or another staff member is doing so. If you are unsure if you should administer Narcan, you can always call 911, and ask for direction from the operator.

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# Code 2 Inappropriate Viewing

**When do we consider something a patron is viewing to be “inappropriate”?**

<https://www.kdl.org/about/policies/acceptable-use>

Libraries are required by CIPA and the Library Privacy Act to provide filtering on our public computers to keep minors from viewing “obscene matter or sexually explicit matter that is harmful to minors”.

Obscenity is considered illegal activity and examples include child pornography, rape and bestiality. Sex, nudity and pornography are not illegal. However, “community standards” are addressed in Section 606 of the Library Privacy Act and do allow KDL some discretion in deciding what we allow the public to view on our computers in order to prevent minors from viewing obscene matter or sexually explicit matter that is harmful to minors.

**What kinds of matter does KDL consider sexually explicit?**

What constitutes “obscene or sexually explicit” matter is widely subjective and varies from community to community. For practical purposes, KDL is choosing to define materials inappropriate for public computer viewing as those that display nudity and acts of sex.

**How will this be made known to patrons?**

The current acceptable use policy is lengthy and at times confusing. KDL is creating a simpler summary of expectations to be displayed when patrons log on to the computers:

**Be Aware:** KDL does not have control over the accuracy or appropriateness of Internet materials. All KDL computers do use filtering software in accordance with federal and state law.

**Be Lawful:** In accordance with federal and state law, patrons should avoid viewing obscene materials. In order to safeguard minors from viewing obscene or sexually explicit matter that is harmful to them, we ask that you avoid viewing materials that show nudity or acts of sex on KDL computers or using KDL Wi-Fi.

**Be Cautious:** KDL cannot safeguard patrons’ financial or personal information when shared on a website.

More information on Internet usage at KDL is available by reading KDL’s full Acceptable Use Policy. Patrons who violate this policy will be asked to comply. If noncompliance persists, patrons may be prohibited from using the library Internet (and possible the library itself) for up to 72 hours.

**1. Remain calm and kindly assertive** (*This is what we need you to do.*)

KDL maintains a commitment to patron privacy. KDL does not expect staff to be explicitly looking for violations of this policy. When violations are observed or made known to staff, however, do one of two things:

- Evaluate the setting. Determine if there are children in the building. Remember that pornography is not illegal. We ask that patrons not view nudity or acts of sex on our computers in order to safeguard minors.
- In cases of child pornography, call the police and report it.

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

If minors are in the building, approach the patron with a copy of the summary of expectations. Highlight the appropriate section. Indicate that the patron has been in violation of the acceptable use policy.

## 3. Ask them to stop

Ask the patron to comply with the acceptable use policy. If patrons do not comply after one warning, terminate the patron’s computer session and complete an incident report. For patrons who are repeat offenders, the branch manager may ban the patron for up to 72 hours and may recommend additional time to the Library Director.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron is observed looking at sexual images of young children.

**Only Response:** Call the police and report it. Talk to your manager and fill out an incident report.

Do NOT approach the patron yourself.

**Scenario 2:** A patron is watching Outlander Season 1 on the public computer. The scene becomes a sexually explicit one that involves nudity. A patron complains to someone at the information desk that the person at the computer next to her is watching porn. There are children in the library.

**Possible Response:** Assure the patron that you will look into the situation. Grab a copy of the summary of expectations and bring it with you to the computer. The patron may or may not still be watching the show when you get there. Regardless of what you personally observe, remind the patron of the policy:

*Hi, can I speak to you for a moment? I just wanted to remind you of our expectations when using our public computers. We ask that you not watch shows or materials that display nudity or acts of sex. If this is observed on a public computer, we will need to terminate the computer session.*

**Scenario 3:** The patron you speak with vigorously denies having looked at something inappropriate.

**Possible Response:** Stay calm. Avoid sounding accusatory. Avoid words like “porn” or “pornography”. Because KDL has defined the expectations in specific terms, return to the words used in the summary of expectations.

*I'm not making any judgment on the quality of the show you're watching. But nudity was observed on this computer, and that is in violation of our acceptable use policy for our public computers.*

f the patron continues to argue, set clear boundaries and give the patron a choice.

*I do not want to argue with you about this issue. Can you assure me that you will not watch anything with nudity or acts of sex in it? If so, we don't need to discuss this any further. If not, I will need to terminate your computer session for the day.*

**Scenario 4:** A patron is watching Outlander Season 1 on the public computer. The scene becomes a sexually explicit one that involves nudity. You observe this as you walk by. There are no children in the library and no one has complained.

**Possible Response:** There is no need for you to address this situation. We intervene in order to prevent harm to minors. Nudity and pornography are not illegal and we do not censor patrons unless there is the potential for harm to minors.

**Scenario 5:** The details of Scenario 4 occur, and there is a complaint from another patron that what is being viewed on the public computer is inappropriate. There are no children in the building.

**Possible Response:** We do not censor patrons unless there is the potential for harm to children, but we do need to address complaints. We can bring the Summary of Expectations to the patron and ask (not tell) them to comply with the acceptable use policy to avoid watching things with nudity or acts of sex.

*Hi, can I speak to you for a moment? I just wanted to remind you of our expectations when using our public computers. We ask that you not watch shows or materials that display nudity or acts of sex. We appreciate you complying with this.*

If patrons complain that this is a violation of their 1st Amendment rights, give them a copy of the Director of Branch Services and Operations' business card.

**Scenario 6:** A patron observes another patron looking at a music video in which actors are dancing suggestively. There is no nudity or acts of sex.

**Possible Response:** Let the patron know that you understand their concern. Show the patron a copy of the Summary of Expectations and convey that what the other patron is viewing is not a violation of our Acceptable Use Policy. Offer to move the patron with the complaint to another computer if they wish.

*Thanks for sharing your concerns with us. I don't know if you've read Internet Acceptable Use Policy. Here's a summary of our expectations. I appreciate your concern, but what the patron is watching doesn't violate this Acceptable Use Policy. If you'd like, you are welcome to move to a different computer a little farther away.*

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If the patron is watching the “suggestive” video near the children’s section, you may opt to move the viewing patron to a computer away from the children’s section.

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# Code 2: Offensive Comment

## What does this unintentionally offensive behavior look like in the library?

In the library, staff often deal with people who make unintentionally offensive comments. The person who makes the comment may not realize the comment is offensive to others, or, may have not intended the comment to come out the way it sounded.

It can be hard to know how to respond to unintentionally offensive comments, and it might be tempting to just let them slide and not address them at all. This is especially true when you can easily tell the offense was accidental. However, we want our libraries to be a safe and welcoming place for everyone. A patron overhearing a comment (and your lack of response) could easily interpret your silence as agreement, and no longer feel safe and welcome in the library. This is why it's essential to address the comment, no matter how uncomfortable it may be.

### 1. Remain calm and be kindly assertive

Whatever the patron is saying may be personally distasteful and go against your values. Do your best to remain neutral. Give the patron the benefit of the doubt if you are unsure what they meant by a comment.

### 2. Give them an out

Avoid embarrassing the patron by indicating that the comment may have been unintentional. When people feel embarrassed, they often get defensive and this can escalate the situation. Whether they meant the comment the way it sounded or not, giving them an out can defuse the situation and prevent a confrontation.

### 3. If necessary, ask them to stop, but be direct

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

**NOTE: If patrons become defensive or aggressive, move to Code 3 Response Framework.**

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** An older man is checking out a magazine with a picture of Caitlyn Jenner on the cover. He comments, "I don't know what's up with these men thinking they can just up and change their gender. If you're born a man, you should stay a man!"

**Possible Response:** We want our libraries to feel welcoming to patrons regardless of their gender identity. A transgendered person overhearing this patron's comment would almost certainly be hurt, and a non-response from a staff member may be interpreted as the staff member agreeing with the comment. If the staff member does not speak up, the patron may no longer feel welcome in the library.

*Some of the other people using the library may think differently on this issue than you do. I know you would never intend this, but others may be upset or hurt by your comment. We try and make the library a welcoming space for everyone.*

**Scenario 2:** A group of teens are playing a computer game together. One of them is clearly losing, and lets out a string of salty expletives. The swearing is overheard by a staff member and several patrons. This is the first time you have had to talk to this teen about swearing in the library.

**Possible Response:** Try to give the teen the benefit of the doubt. It is likely he got caught up in the game and forgot where he was. This is also the first time you've spoken with him about swearing in the library, so he may not know the rules. However, the library is used by patrons of all ages, and inappropriate language needs to be addressed quickly and firmly, especially when it is at a volume to be overheard by other patrons. If possible, talk to the teen alone to avoid embarrassing him in front of his friends.

*Hi John, I need you to take a break from your game for a moment so that we can talk. I realize that you were very involved in playing the game with your friends, and you might not have been paying attention to what you said, but you just said several swear words very loudly. Lots of little kids use the library, and the language you just used is not appropriate here. I need you to stop using that kind of language, or I'm going to have to ask you to leave for the day.*

**Scenario 3:** 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 but don't feel that it was meant as sexual harassment.

**Possible Response:** In this situation, you are fully empowered to use your own judgement. You have the right to make your feelings known and 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.

*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?*

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# Code 2: Responding to a Defensive Patron

## 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, they are verbally harassing you, and you should 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.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron is loudly speaking in the quiet zone of the branch. You walk over to ask them to move to a study room, 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 on an important Facetime conference call. How dare you interrupt me!”

**Possible Response:** Most likely this patron is embarrassed. Keep your voice low (regardless of their volume), acknowledge that you realize this is inconvenient, but reiterate the request. Feel free to offer any other options that may be available. If he continues to be defensive and uncooperative, be direct and explain what will happen if he does not comply.

*I am sorry to interrupt your call, but this is our quiet area. We do have some study rooms available, however, that would provide you with more privacy for your phone call. [If the patron continues to refuse...] Unfortunately, this is a quiet area. You can wrap up your call now and remain here, or you can finish it in the study room or lobby. I’d be happy to help you move your materials.*

**Scenario 2:** A patron comes to the desk because she received an email notice that she had been billed \$29.99 for a book. Checking the notes, you realize that the book was returned looking like it had been torn apart by a dog, and after waiving the cost of four previous books returned in the same condition, this time, she is being charged for the book. She demands to speak to a manager to get to the bottom of this, because she always returns her items on time. Unfortunately, the manager is out, so staff offer to look into the issue. The patron declines, refuses to provide her name or library card, and instead starts talking about how long she has been a reliable patron of KDL.

**Possible Response:** This is a frustrating situation for the patron. Unfortunately, you cannot help her if she doesn’t allow you to. Offer empathy and an apology for the discomfort she is experiencing. Sometimes it is helpful to let people vent for a little while and then offer to help again or get another coworker to offer their assistance. Finally, if she starts to harass staff, the situation has become a Code 3.

*I’m really sorry that the manager isn’t available to help you today. I would be happy to assist you today. Or you may take my manager’s business card so that you can share your concerns directly with her. [The patron refuses the card and continues her rant.] I understand that this is a frustrating situation. Let me see if there is anyone in the back who might be able to help you better. [Sometimes stepping away from the situation and allowing the patron to deal with a coworker is a good alternative.] Unfortunately, if you will not accept our assistance, there really is not anything else we can do for you. You can let us help you now or follow up with our manager at a later time.*

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## 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”). The KDL Way requires that we show kindness, empathy and love to 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 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.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** 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 but don't feel that it was meant as sexual harassment.

**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.

**Scenario 2:** A patron comes up to the service desk and comments, “You got your haircut. It makes you look sexy.” You're uncomfortable with the comment and feel it is meant to embarrass you.

**Possible Response:** Your response remains the same.

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*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?*

If the person persists in mentioning your appearance. Let the patron know. If you can't do so, get a manager or colleague to address it with/for you:

*It makes me uncomfortable when you talk about my appearance. I've told you I don't discuss this at work. I'm asking you to please not do it again.*

**Scenario 3:** A patron frequently talks to you at the desk when he visits the branch. He shares information about his life, and frequently asks your personal opinions on things. Until now, you've been able to deflect these comments with general friendliness, but he eventually tells you that he really likes talking to you and would like to "hang out sometime" or that he would like to "take you out." This is not something that you wish to do.

**Possible Response:** Be kind but firm in declining the invitation. Feel free to make KDL policy the "bad guy" in this situation if you need to.

*Thanks for the invitation, Scott, but I don't go out socially with patrons.*

OR

*Thanks for the invitation, Scott, but I'm afraid KDL discourages us from going out socially with patrons.\**

If the patron persists in asking you out, let him know that these requests make you uncomfortable.

*Scott, I know you probably don't mean to, but I've let you know several times that I don't go out socially with patrons. I would appreciate it if you would stop asking me. It is making me uncomfortable.*

If the patron persists further, escalate it to a Code 3: Sexual Harassment.

\*Note: It is permissible for staff to go out with patrons, if they choose; however, personal relationship interactions should be kept out of the workplace.

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## Code 2: Solicitation

### **What does solicitation look like at the library?**

At the library, solicitation most often comes in the form of person asking for petition signatures or someone handing out pamphlets for a particular cause. At times, you may also have individuals just outside the library or in the library lobby who ask for money or for food.

KDL's policy regarding petitions is that "petitions may not be displayed or circulated in library buildings except as permitted by local municipal ordinance." Check with your manager about your local municipality's ordinance regarding this.

Individuals are not allowed to ask other patrons (or staff) for money or for food. Staff may (and should) provide patrons with information regarding local food pantries, shelters, and health care facilities.

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

This can be a very uncomfortable situation, particularly when confronted with people who have significant needs. You may or may not agree with the premise of the petition. For a patron in need, you may sympathize or (depending on the demeanor of the person) you may feel irritated with the person for asking for donations. In either type of the situation, remain kind and try to withhold judgment. By asking them to stop, you are not passing judgment on their cause or need, you are protecting the rights of other patrons to use the library without being interfered with in any way.

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

Avoid embarrassing the person. If someone is asking for signatures for a petition, calmly explain the local ordinance.

If a person is asking for money or food, let the person know that you sympathize with their need, and that they may not realize it, but that the library does not allow solicitation of patrons.

### **3. Ask them to stop**

Let the person know that they will need to stop the behavior. If a person is petitioning, redirect them to the appropriate location (according to local ordinance).

If a person is asking for money or food, let them know that you are happy to give them information about community resources that might be helpful to them.

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### **Role Playing**

***Scenario 1:*** A person is in the lobby asking patrons entering the building to sign their petition to put a politician back on the ballot.

**Possible Response:** Our response to this is determined by your local municipal ordinances. You should kindly let them know what this ordinance requires of them.

*“Hi Sir. I see that you are asking people to sign your petition. I love to see people who are politically engaged. You’re probably not aware of this, but our local ordinance only allows you to do this [insert ordinance] and only if you don’t impede people from entering the library. I’m going to need you to move outside the building for this. Good luck.”*

**Scenario 2:** A patron comes to the desk and tells you that someone is panhandling in the lobby. You go to the lobby and see a patron talking with another patron, asking them for money because they are hungry and out of work.

**Possible Response:** In this case, we want to make sure that patrons are not impeded from entering our branches; yet we also want to serve as a community resource to a patron in need.

*“Excuse me, Sir. I’m sorry to interrupt. It sounds like you are in need of some resources. Our library policy does not allow you to approach other patrons and ask for these things, but if you want to come with me to my desk, I would be happy to look up some community food pantries or see if we can find resources for any other specific needs you might have.”*

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# KDL Way 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 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.**

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# Calling the Police

## Purpose:

Rarely, you will encounter situations in the library where you feel the safety of staff and/or patrons is in jeopardy and you will need to call the police. This framework will walk you through the process, and explain the questions that you will be asked so that you will know what to expect when you call.

## Guidelines:

### 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. The operator should see the address of your library on their end. However, if our emergency system does not work as designed they may see the address of the Service Center because KDL shares a phone system.

- **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:** In most cases, give the operator your branch closed line number. The number that displays on the operator's end may be an unfamiliar number. Each library has a corded, landline

phone somewhere in their branch that has its own direct phone number. The separate phone line allows the 911 operator to see the address of the branch that called, not the Service Center address. If your emergency phone is in an accessible place, that may be a good number to give the operator. Your manager will know where the phone is, as he or she tests the line yearly.

### 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.

After the incident is over, step away from the desk. Notify your manager, who will notify KDL administration to update them on the situation. Write an incident report.

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#### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A patron is loudly facetiming 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 police is in route.*

**Scenario 2:** A man enters the library openly carrying a hunting rifle. He is not brandishing the rifle, however, he is behaving strangely. He is walking back and forth down a center aisle looking back and forth repeatedly, while occasionally crouching to peer down aisles. He has done this about 6 times.

**Possible Response:** Under Michigan law, the man is within his legal rights to open carry. Neither library staff nor police can legally intervene unless he breaks the law. However, his behavior is odd enough that you have reason to suspect that the situation may escalate. Remember, when in doubt call the police. It is better to call for a false alarm, then not to call at all.

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

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Response: *A man has entered the library with a hunting rifle. \*Describe behavior\* I am afraid that this situation will escalate. I am requesting police presence to protect patrons and staff in the library, though I know that you can't legally intervene unless he brandishes the weapon.*

911 Operator: *Have you approached the man?*

Response: *No. Given his behavior, I did not think it safe.*

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

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## Calling 911 Cheat Sheet

Police Non-Emergency number \_\_\_\_\_

Manager's Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Director's Cell \_\_\_\_\_

### Be prepared for the following types of questions:

*What is the nature of your emergency?*

*What is your address?*

#### Library Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

*What is your direct line?*

#### Library Direct Line:

\_\_\_\_\_

### When the emergency responders arrive, be prepared for the following questions:

*What is the emergency?*

They will probably want more information of what has occurred as they may not receive much info from the dispatcher.

*Have you directed the patron to leave?*

The police need a staff member to tell the person to leave in order for them to make the person leave. If necessary, the officers can accompany you to ensure your safety.

### Take note of the following information because you will need this for your incident report.

*What time did the incident begin?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What time did emergency responders arrive?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Who else witnessed the incident? (List the names of all who were involved or witnessed incident)*

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# Code 3: Physical Fight

## **Purpose:**

Although rare, you may occasionally encounter physical threats or altercations in the library. Always treat these seriously and call the police. Your number one priority is to stay safe yourself so that you can get help. You are not responsible or trained to physically intervene in a fight.

## **Guidelines:**

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

*Physical Threats:* If someone threatens you, take the threat seriously - even if you think it unlikely. Move to a safe location with a barricade between you and the person. Call 911 and remain with other staff members until the police arrive.

*Physical Violence:* If you are hit, grabbed, pushed or otherwise physically harmed by a patron, immediately move to a place of safety, call 911, and remain with other staff members.

If you are unable to get free from a person, yell for your colleagues by name. Once they see what is going on, they should loudly inform the patron that they are calling the police and then do so immediately. This may trigger the patron to let go so you can move to safety.

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

If you do have to speak with the individual, keep other staff with you. Remain calm. Firmly inform them that their behavior violates our policy; tell them to leave the library. If they do not leave, inform them that the police are on their way.

### **3. Enforce boundaries**

*Physical Boundaries:* While waiting for the police to arrive, work to keep a barrier between you and the patron. Remain behind the desk or keep distance between you.

*Verbal Boundaries:* If you must interact with the aggressor, be directive – tell them what you want them to do:

- “You need to take your hands off me.”
- “You need to leave the library.”

Once the police have arrived, explain the situation and let them deal with the individual. The individual should be removed from the library, and you may choose to press charges depending on the severity of the attack. The manager (or their representative - the staff member in charge) may choose to issue a verbal ban of up to 72 hours.

### **4. Afterward Regroup**

After the incident is over, step away from the desk. Breathe deeply. Debrief with your manager or the staff member in charge for the day. Fill out an incident report. The individual in charge will ensure that the Director or his representative is aware of the situation. If media arrives at the library asking about the incident, refer them to the Director of Communications.

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### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** A young mother is attempting to check out her library books when her two-year old starts screaming and crying. Staff are all currently helping other patrons and do not immediately intervene to assist her. An elderly man gets up from the computers and starts yelling at the mother to “Quiet that kid down or I’ll come over and give her something to scream about!” The mother immediately leaves her books and starts yelling back, “You touch my child and I’ll kill you!” Both patrons are now on their feet, facing off, yelling and gesturing at each other.

**Possible Response:** Excuse yourself immediately to deal with the situation. Ideally, have two staff members to assist you. One staff member should call 911 immediately. Both patrons have threatened bodily harm toward another person and should be taken seriously. In addition, both patrons have violated our policy and should leave the library for the day.

You and another staff member should approach the patrons cautiously and attempt to separate the patrons. From a safe distance (out of punching range), firmly tell them to stop yelling and step away from each other. Each staff member will invite one of the patrons to step away and share their side of things. If this doesn’t distract them, inform them the police are on the way to settle the dispute.

Once separated, your goal is to calm the patrons enough to explain that they need to leave for violating our Code of Conduct. Use empathy and paraphrasing to help them feel that you are not judging them. Continue to do this until they are calmer or until the police arrive. Once calmer, provide them with a copy of our Code of Conduct and tell them to leave. Help them gather their things and ensure they leave without another encounter with the other patron. If they leave before the police arrive, you should call and cancel the emergency. If at any point you feel unsafe, step away and wait for the police.

Finally, give yourself time to calm down. Debrief with your manager. Write up an incident report.

**Scenario 2:** A father is sitting in the play area with his children. You have had a complaint about the children yelling. Following Code 1 procedures, you politely request that the children use quieter voices. You thank the father for his cooperation and give him a chance to speak with his children.

About five minutes later, the children are still screaming, and another person has complained. You re-approach the father, point out that you have had a complaint about the noise, and ask if there is anything you can do to assist his family. He starts yelling, calling you names, and gesturing wildly. Immediately concerned for your safety, you take a step back. He grabs your arm, continuing to yell at you.

**Possible Response:** Immediately, inform him firmly to let your arm go. “Sir, let go of my arm.” Repeat this while pointing at your arm. If he does not let go after several repetitions, call for a coworker by name.

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As soon as you are free, move to put a barrier between you and him. Call 911 or have another staff do so. Tell the patron that he cannot grab staff or yell at them and that he needs to leave the library for violating our expectations. If he refuses, inform him that you have called the police and they are on their way. Remain in a safe location. If he walks away, do not engage him again until the police arrive. Simply monitor him from a safe distance to ensure that he is not threatening the safety of anyone else.

***Scenario 3:*** All of a sudden, there is a large huddle of teens yelling in the teen area. When you get closer, you realize that two of them are on the ground wrestling.

**Possible Response:** Loudly and firmly tell them to stop fighting. If they do not immediately stop, tell them you are calling the police and then go do so. If at any time, they stop fighting on their own, ask them to leave for violating our Code of Conduct. You also may ask any of the bystanders to leave if you feel that they were violating our Code of by goading on the participants.

Write up an incident report and speak with your manager.

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# 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.

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## Role Playing

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**Scenario 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.

**Scenario 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 if there is anything can help her find. She steps closer and reaches up to tuck some hair behind your ear, before asking you when you get off shift so you can get to know you 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.

**Scenario 3:** You are cleaning up the storytime room 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.

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# Code 3: Verbal Harassment or Verbal Fight

## **Purpose:**

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. \*Note: Another Code 3 scenario, Physical Fight, addresses physical violence, and/or threats of physical violence. This scenario refers to incidents where a patron is insulting or otherwise verbally harassing staff or patrons, but the patron is not threatening anyone physically.

## **Guidelines:**

### **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-wracking. 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.

---

### Role Playing

**Scenario 1:** 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.*

**Scenario 2:** You hear shouting coming from another area of the library, away from the desk. You can't clearly see what is happening, so you ask another staff member to come with you to check it out. As you approach, two patrons are shouting and cursing at each other.

**Possible Response:** At this point, both patrons are being loud and disruptive, and need to stop or leave the library. As the level of aggressiveness is high, your level of assertiveness should be as well. Tell them firmly that they are violating the code of conduct and ask them to stop. If you have two staff members present, you can attempt to separate the two patrons to speak with them individually.

*You are being loud and disruptive and need to stop, or I will have to ask you both to leave.*

OR

*I need you both to step apart immediately. I will speak with you, and my coworker Jane will speak with you.*

Let the patrons tell you individually what happened. Once they are calm enough that they are able to understand you, explain that their behavior is against our patron rules and responsibilities and that they will need to leave for the day.

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***Scenario 3:*** An adult patron walks into the library and wants to use the computer. Loudly, and in full hearing range of a full bank of patrons on the computer says, “I’m an important person, and I need to use a computer right now. These little n\*\*\*\*s are just playing games. Tell them to get off or I’ll get you fired.” One of the little boys has tears in his eyes.

**Possible Response:** The library is meant to be a welcoming place for everyone, and we do not tolerate verbal harassment or bullying. This comment was both. Firmly tell the patron to stop.

*All patrons have equal access to the library regardless of age or race. I need you to lower your voice and refrain from using such language. I can add you to the waitlist to use the computer. If you have a problem with the policy here is the card of our Director of Branch Services and Operations.*

If they continue to yell or harass, tell the patron to leave. Call the police if they do not.

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