

CHECKOUTS & CHALLENGES: A BRIEF BUT IMPORTANT CONVERSATION

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Resources Mentioned

- [Get Ready Stay Ready Community Action Toolkit for Parents and Caregivers](#)
- [How Labeling Books a “Diverse” Reinforces White Supremacy](#)
- [LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Children's Librarianship: Policies, Programs, and Practices](#)
- [Example Challenge Policy developed by Alexandria Brown](#)
- [Example Challenge Policy developed by Amanda Jones](#)

I. Pro-Active Tactics [Before it Happens]

Public Library

Develop a “Display” box for Pride and other regular displays. These would be books that are just for display. Part of the purpose in this is for the shock value of the empty display - this won't slow down them removing or hiding books on the shelves but it will shift the impact of such a strategic action.

- Build smaller displays and keep additional materials in a place off the floor to restock the display. If one small display is taken, relaunch a new small display. This shows that the library's dedication to LGBTQ
 - For my displays I would pull 100-150 books, mark them as on display in Sierra (not sure if other LMS have a similar feature) so they were still searchable in a catalog if a patron wanted to put them on hold, and then store them behind my desk. This way I wasn't barring people from them but I didn't make it too easy for them to get when I needed them.
- Build in visuals that link to your digital collections that can't be “rage-checked out” as easily – especially if you have pay-per use services like Hoopla (which, I know they aren't really our favorites either) but this will prevent people from going and trying to check out all the digital copies of an ebook or other digital material
- Put the display in a prominent area and don't be afraid to talk to people who are engaging with it in a way that looks suspicious
 - Absolutely do not do anything to put yourself, your coworkers, or your patrons in danger
 - You may not be able to stop them, unfortunately – based on how a lot of library policies are written and the length of time it takes to change them, they may have the right to check those books out – BUT sometimes your presence and just fact that they know they are being watched may deter some people or make them feel less bold.
- Push for your management or board to start considering writing policies around this – right now we are seeing these actions around Pride displays but the odds of them

stopping here are slim - I have had push back about why we don't do white history month displays... so.. it's coming.

- Familiarize yourself with the policies that are already in place and what rights you have underneath those policies
 - There was an example of a religious organization leaving a note after rage checking out materials and based on that, per my library's policy I could have instituted a ban for their behavior. So know what you CAN do within the limits of your policy as it currently stands, and FOLLOW THROUGH.
- Practice what you and your staff will say to patrons and who question you about the content in a book. I have been seeing more and more incidents of people trying to film librarians and educators in "gotcha" moments. Having a spiel down for how to handle these moments can be helpful. Have a clear chain of hierarchy as well. If a patron pushes on low level staff, they need to know they can pass it on to their PIC or manager.
 - While you're at it, include paraprofessional staff in these conversations and preparations. Paraprofessional staff are often the first ones to be approached at the public library desk but are often the ones who receive the least amount of training around these issues because they aren't "viewed as professionals"

School Library

- Don't be afraid to have rotating displays in your library that openly support the things you're scared of, but don't leave them up for extended periods of time. If you offer a wide variety of displays that cover a wide variety of things you are showing the depth of your collection and can showcase your support for all kinds of things, some of which your community probably supports and some that you might not even support. It's important to let your community know that you are there for ALL students and not just certain groups. Make sure your displays are varied in that they coincide with a month's theme, like Pride Month, but don't relegate displays to JUST those months.
- Make sure all displays offer a wide variety of representation, regardless of the month's themes. For example, Pride Month should have books by and about disabled characters.
- Have student volunteers or Affinity/Identity Groups create displays. It's a great way to get student involvement. A school librarian recently shared they have a student volunteer who loves doing these and always garners a lot of attention with these displays.
- Don't label books with identity based subject headings (e.g. LGBTQIA+, gays-fiction). Aside from being bad practice, this makes it too easy for parents or community members to find the kinds of books they are looking for. Make them do the hard work finding titles and hunting them down. Create ways for students to find these books by offering a physical list they can look through while in the library. Consider using Canva to create book lists to display in [something like this](#). Several LMSes offer ways to build digital collections or reading lists, and often those can be limited to certain patron groups such as "just students." Parents can still get in if they log in as their student, but it protects the list from being found by the community at large. Again, this is only the subject headings. Don't erase queerness from descriptions.
- At the beginning of each school year when students come in for their first library visit, discuss with them how it's your job, as a librarian, to build a collection that has

something for everyone in the building. Some books may not be something they are interested in or even agree with, and that's ok. Some books may not be for them, but they are for someone else. Ask them to talk to you if they find a book they are concerned about. Explain how just because something isn't for them, that doesn't mean we are going to keep it from everyone else. If it is not for them, they can choose to just not read it. To be clear, this is not to say your library should be claiming neutrality or keeping books with harmful or dangerous content, but it is important that all students feel like they have access to the library's materials.

- Offer privacy covers for students if they want to check out a book with a book cover that might signal it's LGBTQIA+ or something else with potential to offend. This also is a way for students to read a book they might be embarrassed to have their friends see them read. It's also just fun. Kids don't get to use book covers anymore. You can even have them make their own in the makerspace! Just offer them as a fun option and do NOT say it's to hide your book.
- Make sure you have a Library Task Force/Cadre/Team in place. Make sure you have teachers, parents, an admin, and students on this team. This team needs to meet regularly to discuss the library program, programming ideas, and offering feedback. Talk to them about the purpose of a school library and use information from ALA and AASL (like the Library Bill of Rights) to help them understand what your role is and the role of the library. Advocate for yourself and your space with this group. If your district has a policy in place for challenged books, go over it with this team and let them know their role in that challenge. If your district doesn't have one, come up with one with this group. Have this team in place from day one.
- Make public on your website how you choose books and determine their appropriateness for your students and other relevant info like the Library Bill of Rights. If you are comfortable, make public a way concerns can be brought to you, like a Google Form or point them to the policy for challenges. This will let people know you are open to looking again at a text or having a conversation with STUDENTS and GUARDIANS OF STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL ONLY! Make your library available during open house for parents and caregivers to stop in and talk. The more you open those lines of communication the harder it will be for people to act like they don't know the proper procedures or how to communicate with you.

II. Re-Active Tactics [It Happened. Now What?]

Public Library

- Work with your library's marketing and/or PR department and see if you can release a statement about the situation and make it clear where the library stands on these situations
 - Tricky because this assumes you will have the support of your admin which depending on your locale may not be the case
 - If you're unionized talk to your union if you're not getting the support you need from your admin

- Immediately redeploy a virtual display with QR codes (and for those who have phones that can't process QR codes, a short link as well,) linking to digital materials the library offers. The quicker you can bring a display back up I think the better. If you still have saved physical material, GREAT.

School Library

- The moment this happens, contact your Library Team. Follow the procedures for book challenges.
- If you find yourself here without a plan, the baseline would be to have all members of your team read the book and meet to discuss it and make a plan for responding to the challenge.
- Contact your state's library organization and see if they can offer assistance. If you don't know your state organization, contact [AASL](#).

Self Censorship

- Make sure you are purchasing and displaying books even if you fear the backlash. You are the professional, and if you've taken the time to read or research the books and feel they are a good fit for your community, stand by that. Do not bend before there is an issue.
- If you have a strong challenge policy/procedures, make sure they are being followed in good faith. If they aren't, don't be afraid to push back and get your constituents involved.

Tweets by Other Library Professionals

1. Buy more LGBTQIA+ books. Display them year round. Grow your collection Pay for queer programming. You can also limit amount checked out from displays ... (not a bad policy for all displays to keep them fresh longer) [\[Tweet\]](#)
2. 1. Have displays of books year round and not just during pride month. 2. Remind patrons that books that are routinely checked out get repurchased so they're available--it's so good to see high demand for these titles! [\[Tweet\]](#)
3. Showing up to library board meetings and letting librarians and board members know that there's support for Pride displays and LGBTQ books helps. [\[Tweet\]](#)
4. If they announce they are stealing the books, that's theft of library property and I'm banning them. If they check things out, staff are going to place holds. They don't return them, they get billed and their card is blocked, we will repurchase asap. [\[Tweet\]](#)
5. Possible useful idea: When making a book display, create a sign to put behind the book that includes cover, title, etc. AND a QR code to the eBook edition (or to a consortial loan option, etc). This way when the title is checked out, other means of reading it are revealed. [\[Tweet\]](#)
6. I put QR codes on a display for the first time the other day. I thought I was being extra by linking to the full booklist, a list of just ebooks, and a list of just downloadable audiobooks, but I've already seen traffic to all with only one checkout. Pretty pleased! [\[Tweet\]](#).