ARRT Book Club Study
August 24,2022
Virtual Meeting
Leadership Topic
Led by Layne Arens
Notes taken by Elizabeth Hopkins
13 participants

TMI During Book Club: How to Handle
Personal Disclosures and Awkward Confessions

-People reveal all sorts of things in a public library- even in a regular reference interview. I'm coming at this as a public librarian not a therapist. It can feel triggering to some people to read a book like this. It might make them withdraw or not come to the book club. On the other hand there might be someone who does want to talk about their bad experiences. How do we deal with those heartbreaking or awkward moments? I think librarians also present themselves as a nice trustworthy person so this happens to us a lot.

-This happened a lot in my discussions because of one individual. I do like to redirect if something goes astray, but it felt almost rude to try to bring the conversation back to the book. People come to book clubs to connect with other humans and that's a way those connections are made. I tried to be respectful but also felt very uncomfortable.
-Often I would get pushback from other attendees if they were made to feel uncomfortable. A book discussion shouldn't be a therapy session but as you said, people come to connect.
-I like to start every meeting with a welcome and a reminder to be respectful of others and different opinions. I've noticed things can go off track when I forget to do this.
-I had a situation where someone shared a story from their childhood and used racist language.

Do you set ground rules before a meeting?
-Someone recently in a discussion used a racist term, but they were quoting someone else. And then 30 seconds later I had the "What just happened moment?" Do I let it go or address it right away?
-You don't want to scold them in the moment but you need to make sure everyone feels welcome.
-I think patrons are looking for us to set the tone. It's tricky. Layne shared this article that had some good tips which could be applied in a book club setting.

Do people begin a discussion addressing the book has uncomfortable issues?
-I've been trying harder to mention if there's any triggers in the titles that we're considering for book club.
-One of the worst discussions was when we read Bel Canto and a patron said: "Well, when I was held hostage..." It was an amazing story and we heard all of it, but couldn't redirect back to the book after that.
-I've had a few members come to me privately to say the book wasn't for them and they wouldn't come to the meeting. I wonder if I should be doing some kind of trigger warning.
-I've had participants say they didn't like the book/didn't finish but they came to listen.
-Should participants be a part of establishing ground rules.

-Non-Violent Communication by Rosenberg. Very helpful regarding difficult conversations. Also We Need to Talk by Celeste Headlee.

-We did a "what are you reading?" meeting...One patron brought in a "gut health" book and she started detailing her IBS journey. But she's hilarious and we were all laughing.
-I once discussed a book with an arranged marriage featured in it...one member shared that she had been a part of an arranged marriage. Then the rest of the group started to grill her with question after question. When she revealed that- did she invite that response or did it cascade and I let that happen?
-You run the risk of someone being made to feel like a token and need to represent a whole group.
-The less diverse a group you have, the more likely that something harmful/offensive will be said.
-When are we facilitators and when are we moderators? We want to invite challenging discussions. It makes for a heartier discussion.

Has anyone taken any trainings that would help? CPL staff have taken training regarding de-escalating a crisis. Or any other resources?
-Great Books Discussion- the rules are you can ONLY discuss what's on the page.
-Sometimes the emotional sharing really enriches the discussion!
Another helpful book: Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself by Nedra Glover Tawwab

-End on a self-care note: secondary trauma is a real thing and hearing upsetting things can take a toll on you professionally. What do you do after an exhausting or emotionally draining meeting?
-A glass of wine!

-Share with a trusted colleague.
-Having a debrief with your team.

Another helpful article.