

KNOW YOUR KIDS' RIGHTS!



WHAT IS INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM?



Intellectual freedom is protection of your rights to read, to listen, to write, and to speak about your beliefs and opinions. It protects what you communicate and what others communicate to you. Intellectual freedom happens in public—the things you say or see or hear outside of your home, and it happens in private—the things you say or see or hear inside your home. Intellectual Freedom includes the information you learn from books, magazines, websites, movies, television shows, radio programs, or songs.

These rights are afforded to everyone, of any age. It can sometimes be challenging to acknowledge the intellectual freedom of a child while also exercising your rights as a parent, or fulfilling your duties as a teacher or librarian. Defense of a child's right to intellectual freedom is never meant to supplant or override a parent's wishes, but rather as a tool for all parents and caregivers to help their children grow and succeed.

WHY PROTECT THESE RIGHTS?



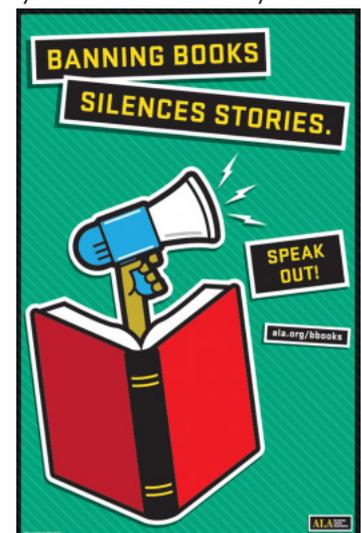
The American Library Association believes that we should be able to see, read, or hear all sides of an issue. Freedom of expression is both a right guaranteed by the Constitution and also a great responsibility. Every person has a right to form their own opinion; listening to opinions different from yours may change your mind, strengthen your beliefs and help you to better understand and appreciate the people around you. If we are not allowed to have all the information available, how would we make educated decisions in our lives or influence others to make educated decisions? How can democracy work if people cannot express themselves and talk to one another to make informed choices?

While most think of news and nonfiction when considering access to information, it also applies to fiction for children, teens, and adults. Even picture books are a part of Intellectual freedom. Stories can represent people from various perspectives and walks of life, and restricting access to them could deny valuable information to their readers. By protecting a child's right to read widely, you help create thoughtful readers and responsible future citizens who are ready to think critically.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO READ?



Libraries have a special responsibility to uphold the First Amendment. The library does this by owning and circulating materials that express all sorts of opinions, for all sorts of interests and for many different information needs. Sometimes a person or a group may not like the content of some of these library materials. They may demand that materials be removed from the library or that circulation of materials be restricted to a particular population (i.e., adults only) because they don't want children to be able to read or see them. This is referred to as a *challenge*.



When people make challenges, they may be asked to fill out a form and write down exactly what they don't like about the material. The challenge is then usually given to a committee of librarians who must decide if the challenge has merit or is an attempt at censorship. Censorship is the act of removing access entirely to a book based on its content, which is a very serious issue for libraries. Everyone has different ideas about what should or should not be available for public consumption. That is why we cannot allow collection decisions to be impacted by individual agendas.

Your children do have individual rights, with regard to reading. They have the right to share their ideas, and to read about the ideas or stories of others. They have the right to approach parents, teachers, librarians, and principals with concerns about their intellectual freedom. They also have the right to argue against a decision to remove a book from their school or public library, up to and including circulating petitions and (with parental permission) speaking to media about their concerns.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY?



In the library, privacy means that no one but library staff knows the names of the books, movies, music, or other items that you borrow from the library. The library must keep confidential the materials that you check out and may not share with anyone the titles or any personal information about you, unless served with a warrant from law enforcement.

This is an important component of intellectual freedom, because it gives a reader the opportunity to seek out new or sensitive information without fear of judgment or censure. Taking away a reader's right to privacy has a chilling effect on their right to read, as they will be less likely to read books that they need if their fear of the book being discovered is too great.

Minors—including young children—have this same right to privacy. There may be books that can help or educate a child, but would negatively impact or even endanger them if other children or adults in their lives discovered them. This is why many libraries do not share check-out information of children above a certain age with their parents or caregivers: to afford them the same rights as everyone else. In some states, the library may be required to share your child's information if you have the proper identification that shows you are their legal guardian. Teachers and librarians are always willing to work with a child and their parent or caregiver on concerns about the information their child is accessing, as well.

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS AS A PARENT?



A parent or caregiver always has the first and most important say in how their child interacts with the world around them. A child's right to intellectual freedom is shaped and guided by those who care for them, which includes protecting them from things they aren't ready to process, and instilling family and cultural traditions. It is completely appropriate for a parent or caregiver to work with schools and libraries to ensure this, with the important caveat that the intellectual freedom of other children and families not be compromised. Similarly, it is also appropriate to speak out against policies or actions that potentially jeopardize your child's intellectual freedom.

For teachers and librarians, the best way to defend against these sorts of conflicts is with clearly defined policies for curricular and collection development that affirm both a commitment to intellectual freedom and a focus on content that serves the library's community.