

FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS

Library policies and procedures which effectively deny minors equal access to all library resources available to other users violate the Library Bill of Rights. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

Article 5 of the Library Bill of Rights states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views." The "right to use a library" includes free access to and unrestricted use of all services, materials and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to and use of library resources, based solely on the chronological age, education level or legal emancipation of users violates article 5.

Libraries are charged with the mission of developing resources to meet the diverse information needs and interests of the communities they serve. Services, materials and facilities which fulfill the needs and interests of library users at different stages in their personal development are a necessary part of library resources. The needs and interests of each library user and resources appropriate meet those needs and interests must be determined on an individual basis.

Librarians cannot predict what resources will best fulfill the needs and interests of any individual based on a single criterion such as chronological age, level of education or legal emancipation.

The selection and development of library resources should not be diluted because of minors having the same access to library resources as adult users. Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community and restricts access for all library users.

Librarians and governing bodies should not resort to age restrictions on access to library resources in an effort to avoid actual or anticipated objections from parents or anyone else. The mission, goals and objectives of libraries do not authorize librarians or governing bodies to assume, abrogate or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents or legal guardians. Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents -- and only parents -- have the right and responsibility to restrict the access of their children -- and only their children -- to library resources.

Parents or legal guardians who do not want their children to have access to certain library services, materials or facilities should so advise their children. Librarians and governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private

relationship between the parent and the child. Librarians and governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to provide equal access to all libraries resources for all library users.

Librarians have a professional commitment to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free and equal access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Librarians and governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors.

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