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LIBR-260A: Programming and Services for Children

Week 8 Discussion Post

Book Groups and Booktalks

**Discussion prompt: *What would you do if a parent of a book club member came to you with a concern that the book chosen for the upcoming meeting was inappropriate? How could you have that conversation so both you and the parent were satisfied after your talk? What reasons could appeal to the parent for you to keep the book? What options could you offer the parent?***

Handling a Book Challenge

I think one of the first things I would try to do would be to provide a high level of customer service to the parent, no matter what the concern is, and how I personally felt about it. Maintaining a level of professionalism will instill trust in the parent that you are legitimately willing to listen to their concerns, and that you aren’t basing your judgment on your personal feelings or emotions. As mentioned in our textbook, parents sometime just want someone to listen to their concerns, so allowing them the time and space to do this will be key to making sure both parties are satisfied with the discussion. Let the parent voice their concerns completely, do not interrupt, or act disinterested- actively listen to what they are saying and try to understand where they are coming from. After the parent has fully let you know their concerns, then address each of them.

If the book is for a book club, it will probably be good to develop a written book selection policy for the club, so that this document could be presented to parents in these situations. Discuss the book within the context of the policy to make clear to the parent how the book meets the objectives and goals of the book club.

Another good thing would be to provide a variety of outside reviews and recommendations about the book to the parent. For example, point out if the book has won awards, show them reviews and/or recommendations by prominent professional organizations such as ALA/ALSC , the Association of hildren’s Librarians of Northern California, etc. Also you could use these sources to show how many outside sources believe the book is appropriate for certain grade levels and age ranges, to show them that you carefully based your decision after taking into a number of factors about the book, not just picking a random book from the shelf to give to their child.

At my library we currently have a 4th and 5th grade book club. I believe the library received grant money or money from our Foundation to purchase a number of copies of the books to be read so that all participants can have their own copy. If you were in a similar situation, you could tell the parent the books are already purchased and have been distributed to other group members at this time, and that it is too late to change the book selection. Remind the parent that the book group is a service provided by the library for any child to participate in, but ultimately it is up to the parent to make the final decision. Let them know their opinions are valued and will be taken into consideration for future book selections. You could offer them the book for the next session, so that they have a chance to read and review the book beforehand. You could offer other similar books that they may be more happy with.

An important thing that I’ve learned while working at a public library is that we often aren’t able to provide services that are going to satisfy every last one of our patrons, but we can listen to their concerns, take them seriously, and never let our personal feelings cloud the way we treat them. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, and it isn’t our job to try to change the opinions of others. If parents and patrons see that we have carefully thought out our decisions, they may still not agree with them, but they will have more respect for you and the process.