

# Intellectual Freedom

Volunteer Training

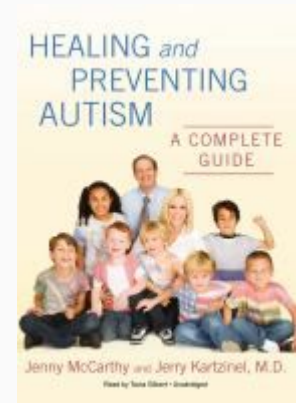
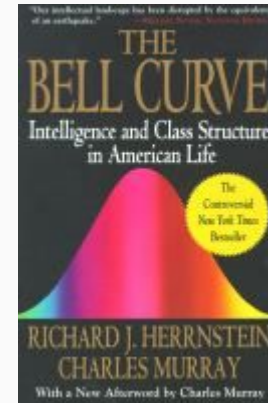
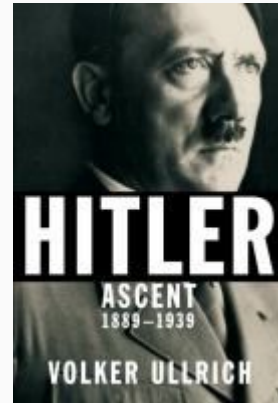
# Intellectual Freedom

The concept of intellectual freedom-- the freedom to hold opinions on any topic and publish them freely without government restraint-- has been a longstanding core value for American libraries. This means access to ideas and expressions that we may personally find disturbing, odious or frightening.

This presentation will introduce you to the concept of intellectual freedom, why it is so important to libraries and librarians, and the role it plays in shaping library services.

# Multnomah County Library's Commitment to Intellectual Freedom

It is the principle of intellectual freedom, not the contents, the ideas or expressions themselves that library staff and civil libertarians defend



# Intellectual Freedom | Background & Principles

The foundational document of intellectual freedom in American Libraries is the [Library Bill of Rights](#), which was first adopted by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1939.

But the American ideal of intellectual freedom runs much deeper than that, and was perhaps most seminally expressed in the [First Amendment](#) of the constitution of the United States.



# Intellectual Freedom | Privacy and Confidentiality

Protecting patrons' privacy and confidentiality are also key components of Libraries' commitment to intellectual freedom.

Libraries protect patron records and do not disclose them to anyone other than cardholders, except as required by law.

Even employees don't view or discuss patron records except as necessary to provide service.

# Intellectual Freedom | Patron Records

Library employees access patron records ONLY if necessary as part of our assigned work duties.

- We protect all records from accidental disclosure
- We separate patron names from aggregate data
- We observe purge schedules and shredding protocols
- We ensure computer use records are kept private



# Intellectual Freedom | Reference & Referral

If we observe confidentiality, patrons will feel free to access all the library's materials, even on controversial or sensitive subjects.

Always keep in mind that reference questions may involve topics the patron would prefer to keep confidential, and should be handled accordingly.



# Intellectual Freedom | Customer Service Example

A patron you have been friendly with for years checks out a book on Alzheimer's disease. A close relative of yours has been battling the disease and you would like to say something comforting. Is this okay?

*No, it's not okay because you cannot know why the patron is checking out the material and it could be a very sensitive subject for them.*



# Intellectual Freedom | Challenges to Policy

Beyond protecting privacy rights, questions of intellectual freedom inform a number of library policies.

- Children's access to materials
- Internet access and internet filtering
- Collection development
- Related service policies

# Intellectual Freedom | Children's Access to Materials

Most libraries allow children to borrow materials from the entire collection, not just children's materials. The responsibility for a child's reading material resides with their parent or guardian.



# Intellectual Freedom | Internet Access & Filtering

Multnomah County Library provides free access to the internet.

- Adults (18 years and older) may choose filtered or unfiltered searching at each login.
- Teens (13-17) have the choice of filtered or unfiltered internet access unless their parent or guardian designates filtered access.
- Children (12 years and younger) have filtered internet access unless a parent or guardian designates they may choose between filtered and unfiltered access.

Parents may choose to override these default internet access options for their child.

# Intellectual Freedom | Diverse Opinions

People have differing needs and expectations about the library's appropriate role and the materials it should offer.

Libraries need to offer a broad, diverse collection to meet the needs of all their users. This means some patrons may be offended by materials that other users want and need.



# Affirmative Collection Development

How does MCL's  
collection support  
Intellectual Freedom?

MCL selects material to:

- Meet public demand
- Fill gaps in the collection
- Seek diverse voices

And by the merit of the work as a whole.

# Intellectual Freedom | Responding to Challenges

Here are types of challenges you may encounter as a volunteer.

A patron:

- Demands a book be taken out of circulation
- Requests a book be limited to adults only
- Objects to “R” rated DVDs

If someone comes to you with a concern, please listen carefully and sincerely, then help them find a supervisor, person in charge or MCL staff member who can answer their questions and respond to the concern.

# Intellectual Freedom | For More Information

[American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom](#)

[Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse](#)

[Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy](#)

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