

DEAL WITH "BOOK CHALLENGES" IN YOUR STORE

This subsection offers specific strategies you can use to respond to book challenges from customers in your store. The table below and the conversation tree that follows can be used to train booksellers.

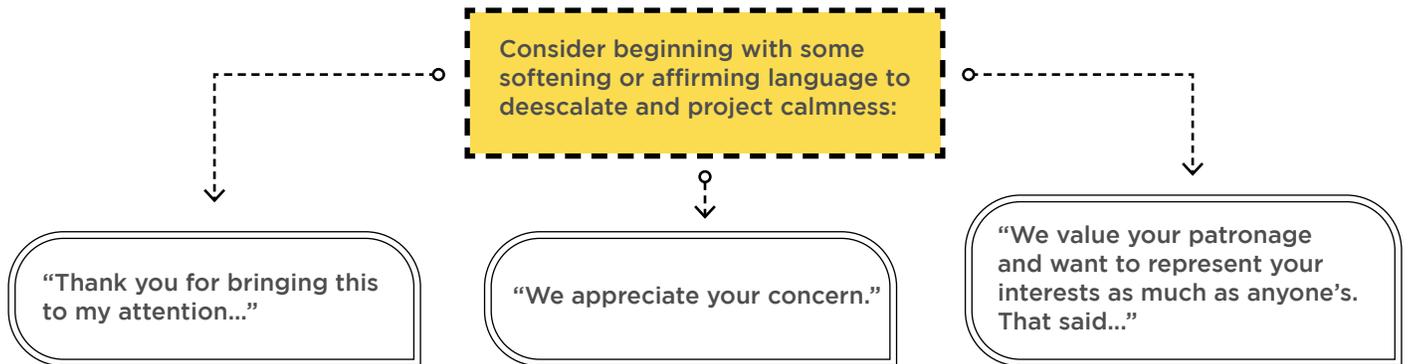
Note: *It is highly recommended that you and/or your staff practice these aloud and figure out which strategies each individual feels most comfortable with.*

STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES
CHALLENGE THE CHALLENGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask them to point to specific pages with offensive content. They may not be able to find one or refuse to try.• Create a form for customers to fill out if they want to challenge a book. Include page numbers as a required field in your customer concern form.• Look out for instances where representation (LGBTQ+ characters or themes, non-white characters or discussion of race) is being framed as inappropriate (pornography, racism).• Continually deflect from the general to the specific: presented with "this section is woke," ask if they can tell you which specific titles they object to; then page number; then engage.• Ask the customer to translate vague ideological terms like "woke" into more specific complaints.
PASS THE BUCK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BIPOC employees should not be the ones to field racially motivated challenges, nor should queer/trans employees have to field homophobic and transphobic challenges. Others should step in where possible.• If you are not a manager, send them to your manager.• Say you will bring it up with your manager, who is not here at the moment.• Say the material has been approved, has been judged age-appropriate, etc. Either stick with the passive voice or say the judgment was made by the publisher/book buyer/etc.• Give them a customer concern form to fill out.



STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES
<p>REFER TO STORE POLICY OR COMMUNITY STANDARDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider having a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy or program for your store that staff can refer to, while being aware that some customers will object to discussion of DEI/EDI as “wokism.” • “The majority of our customers support this content, and we strive to represent the community. There are plenty of titles in our store that do not have LGBTQ+ content or political themes. I would be happy to show you some.”
<p>USE DEESCALATION STRATEGIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to how you say something as well as what you say: use soft tones when possible, match their volume/intensity and step it down gradually, do not be more aggressive than the customer. • Pay attention to non-verbal cues: maintain eye contact, sit if the person is sitting or stand if they are standing, and maintain personal distance (more than one arm’s length away). • Ask the customer if they can “walk with you” to defuse the situation, take a breath, or move to somewhere you have more support. • Don’t threaten, argue, challenge, order, or shame the other person. • Check out our “Top 10 Things to Know About: Non-Violent Communication & De-escalation” article and webinar.

Use the following flowchart or “decision tree” to craft your own preferred responses. They provide examples putting the above strategies into action. Don’t forget the deescalating language, and make sure to adapt them to suit your needs, community, and comfort.



Yes, these sound robotic. That is kind of the point! You want to seem unflappable, in control, and not do anything that escalates the situation. The point is safety, not clapping back or winning the argument.

IF THEY SAY...

“Do you have any books by conservative politicians?” OR Ask for a specific title by a conservative politician and accuse you of bias for not having it OR Ask why you only have books by liberals and “Leftists”

In reference to LGBTQ+ content in the store/in the children’s section: “It is not appropriate to have this material where children can access it” OR “Stop sexualizing our children/trying to trans our children” OR Accusations of “grooming”

YOU CAN SAY...

“The politics section is over here. I’d be happy to order a specific title for you if we don’t have what you’re looking for.”

“Our inventory reflects the interests of our customers, and we haven’t had much interest in that book. I will make a note that you asked about it.”

“Our store supports the LGBTQ+ community in many ways, including by carrying books by and for LGBTQ+ children and families.”

“There is no sexual content in the children’s section. Anything in this section has been deemed age-appropriate.”

“If you find a depiction of sexual activity in a book in this section, please show me the specific page [and I will report it to my manager].”

De-escalating Language

IF THEY SAY...

“This book [which promotes anti-racism] is racist” OR “Stop pushing Critical Race Theory/CRT on our children” or “Children are too young to deal with race”

YOU CAN SAY...

“Let me get a Customer Concern Form for you to fill out.”

“We respect your right to give your children whatever books you want, but we have a wide array of books so that parents can make their own decisions about what they want their children to read.”

“We try to carry diverse books so that every reader/child can see themselves reflected in what they read.”

“Critical race theory would be in the law or philosophy section. It is much too difficult for the children’s section.”

“We hope our books will reflect the complexity of the world in terms children can understand so they can navigate it more effectively.”