

QandANJ.org Suggestions for Handling Chat Sessions with Difficult or Distressed Customers

I. Dealing with difficult customers

Because of the anonymous environment of virtual reference, librarians may encounter difficult customers. Until a customer has become abusive, he or she must be given the benefit of the doubt. It is often helpful to think of how you may interact with this customer, and what you might say if they were standing right in front of you. Following are some examples of challenging customer behaviors.

Customers who log on with no particular question or who just wish to “chat” with the librarian should be encouraged to ask a specific question. If he or she does not have one, the librarian may suggest that the customer log back on when he or she does have a question to ask, before disconnecting. If it is very busy, with a lot of questions coming in, you may want to tell the customer who has no particular question that “there are a lot of people waiting, and when they have a question, please feel free to log backing.” Please try to make your language as friendly at possible at all times, and the customer should understand.

Customers who seem impatient should be “checked in” with to let them know that you are working hard to find them information. Statements such as “You have a very challenging question, and it is taking me more time to find good resources for you,” gives the customer more information regarding our process. It also reminds them that we are real people, and not robots!

Customers who are rude or obscene, who ask an inappropriate question, who use offensive language, should be sent a message (scripted or not) appropriate to the situation and may be offered a chance to redeem themselves:

- “I do want to help you with this, but I need some more time to search. If you aren’t able to wait, you may want to consider logging in again when you have more time.”
- “We aren’t able to tolerate rude behavior on this service. Should we continue or just end the call now?”
- “If you have a question for us, please rephrase it again with more appropriate language.”
- “I feel as though the behavior that you are exhibiting is inappropriate. Please work with me so I can provide the best service possible to you.”

At the next instance of such behavior, they should be sent a message explaining that they have no more chances left and the session will be terminated:

- “Sorry, but since you insist on using this kind of abusive language, I’m going to need to end the call. When you have an information question and can use appropriate language, we will be glad to help you then. Goodbye for now.”
- Sorry, but since you continue to act inappropriately, I am going to need to end the call. We will be glad to help you at another time when you are feeling better. Goodbye for now.”

Customers who threaten the librarian should not be tolerated. Either the “Inappropriate” script should be pushed, or the librarian may respond with something legal:

- “Sorry to need to point this out - but by using this service you agree not to send any question or content that is illegal, harassing, libelous, threatening, harmful, or obscene - and does not violate any applicable local, state, national, or international law. Please contact us again when you have a question that we would be able to address here. Goodbye for now.”

If the customer uses a phrase that could be categorized into one of the three areas described below, the session would merit being ended, using the "Inappropriate" script

- a. Expletives/Profanity/Racial Slurs
Example: "What the f**k is taking so long?"
But not: "Can you hurry it up?"
- b. An insult directed at the current librarian
Example: "What are you stupid?"
But not: "That other librarian didn't have a clue."
- c. Personal questions of a sexual nature
Example: "Hey, you want to get it on?"
But not: "Where do babies come from?"

B. Explicit Material

Librarians should not assume that the customer is looking for pornography if they are looking for images of the reproductive system. If a librarian suspects that pornography is what the customer is looking for, often times they will get bored and disconnect if you send them images from medical sites, or fine art. QandANJ librarians will not intentionally provide pornography to customers of any age. If a customer persists, librarians should inform the customer that questions seeking online pornography are beyond the scope of the service.

QandANJ librarians should not knowingly bypass a filter in recognition of the wishes of the parent/guardian, school, or other institution which installed the filter. A website which contains such language or content can be provided but explicit content not cut and pasted.

Example: "lyrics to jay z show me what you got?" (librarian could push:
<http://www4.islanddefjam.com/media/kingdomcome/lyrics.htm#4>)

C. Sexual Questions

Questions about sexual education, sexual health, or human anatomy should be initially treated as legitimate reference questions. If the customer's questions or comments become inappropriate during the transaction, the librarian should treat the call as a difficult customer, described in Section A.

D. Working with distressed customers

The QandANJ service is not intended for providing service to customers who need assistance beyond the scope of reference service. Some examples are customers who are in danger, ill, depressed, or suicidal. The librarian's role in such circumstances is to provide a referral to an agency that may provide the assistance the customer may need.

Customers who state that they are ill or in danger should be instructed to call 911 or their local police department.

Customers who state that they are depressed or suicidal should direct users to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), the National Suicide Hopeline at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433), or the New Jersey Crisis Hotline site at <http://suicidehotlines.com/newjersey.html> .

Customers who have other social service problems may be referred to the New Jersey Information and Retrieval help line in their county: <http://airsnj.org/IRsinNJ04.htm>

Additional Resources:

New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault: <http://www.njcasa.org/programs.htm>

NJ Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-572-SAFE (7233)

NJ Statewide Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-601-7200

Womanspace NJ Emergency Contact site: <http://0189549.netsolhost.com/?id=27&st=20>

NJ Domestic Violence Shelters: <http://www.sboard.org/SHELTERS/NJ.HTM>

E. Personal Opinions

Librarians should try to avoid giving their personal opinions or making comments about the matter of the customer's question. Offering opinions on medical or legal questions is never appropriate.

F. Customer Privacy

Avoid asking customers for any more information than is necessary to complete the transaction. When librarians do need to ask for personal information (a customer's grade in school, home library, or whether they have a library card), they should be sure to explain why the information is necessary. Librarians should have customers type in their own library card numbers and passwords when appropriate.

G. Librarian Privacy

Librarians are under no obligation to answer personal questions from customers, such as their real name, gender, location, or schedule.

H. Questions about the service

Customers may ask questions about the QandANJ service itself. Librarians may answer their questions or direct them to the "About QandANJ" information on the main **www.QandANJ.org** page. Questions about the service's policies or management or very specific questions about procedures, funding, or staffing should be referred to the generic QandANJ.org email address at qandainfo@qandanj.org. **Please do not give out the Project Coordinator's email address or telephone number.**

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