

## Minors' Use of the Internet in Libraries

On 11/27/07 Sandy Messick, Director of Library Services at Woodruff Memorial Library in La Junta, posted to the Colorado Libnet listserv the following inquiry regarding the use of the Internet by minors in libraries:

**I am curious about policies for internet use for minors. Are there legal issues? Do you prohibit use for minors without parental permission? Do you limit by age? Do all card holders have access to Internet? We are looking at changes to our policy around the first of 2008. All feedback will be appreciated.**

-----Responses-----

Here's our policy, revised after the filtering legislation, then adopted by our board.

### Access by Minors to Internet Resources

The primary mission of the DISTRICT is to provide public information. Nevertheless, it is the intent of the DISTRICT to limit access by minors to Internet resources that are obscene or illegal.

The DISTRICT does this in a variety of ways:

- a. The District has created web pages designed to direct minors to positive, high quality sites, created or reviewed by librarians.
- b. The DISTRICT offers various classes that teach parents and children how to search the World Wide Web safely and effectively.
- c. The DISTRICT provides supervision of public space. Minors, like adults, are expected to behave in a civil and appropriate manner in the library. The display of visual material that is sexual in nature or that might be considered immediately offensive to others constitutes rude behavior in many circumstances. In such circumstances, at the discretion of library staff, patrons will be asked to cease such behavior. If they do not, they may be ejected from the library, and risk the loss of future library privileges.
- d. The DISTRICT also supervises public space by placing of Internet workstations, wherever possible, in direct line of sight of our staff. Further, the DISTRICT will investigate all complaints lodged by other patrons.
- e. The DISTRICT will limit access on Internet workstations by supervising their use through observation, and employing an "internet protection measure." Technology, and various technological tools are changing rapidly. Library staff shall seek to remain current concerning various options, and may experiment with them from time to time to better understand them. It is understood that no technology has proved

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to be 100% effective in allowing only "good" content and blocking only "bad."

f. As specified by state and federal laws (HB 04-1004 Internet Protection in Public Libraries, C.R.S. 24-90-601-606 and Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), Pub. L. No. 106-554) the District will filter all Internet capable computers.

g. To address issues of safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms and other forms of electronic communication, parents and legal guardians should urge minors to follow basic safety guidelines: never give out personal information (name, address, phone number, etc.), never arrange via a computer to meet someone and never respond to messages that are threatening or suggestive, remembering that people online may not be who they say they are.

### 5. Enforcement and Consequences

No one, minor or adult, has the right to use public property to commit crimes. At the same time, no policy can ensure that crimes will never be committed. If library patrons are found to be accessing materials that may be, at the discretion of library staff, obscene or illegal, they will be ejected from the library, and may be barred from future use of library resources.

James LaRue  
Director  
Douglas County Libraries

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Here's a policy page I always refer to as a great example for public libraries:  
<http://www.multcolib.org/about/i-policies.html>.

Kevin Bokay

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We have unfettered access for all library patrons no matter what age. Of course I qualify that with the fact that we have computer filters installed (that is the only legal issue we contend with).

A person does need a library card in order to get on a computer. We also use guest cards for the out-of-towners stopping by to check email.

Judy Van Acker  
Director  
John C. Fremont Library

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You may want to review library law, sec 6, internet filtering, for the legal perspective;  
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/LibraryLaw/Part6.htm> or <http://tinyurl.com/yftfxr>

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for the quick guide.

Another resource is the CO Filtering Clearinghouse, put into service after passage of the sec 6, above. <http://www.aclin.org/filtering/>, although a few dead links may occur.

These don't get into policy wording or specifics per se, but do address age and other restrictions stipulated in law.

Eugene Hainer  
Director  
Colorado State Library

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I understand the filtering requirements, I am mostly unclear about how to determine who has the privilege of using Internet, I guess. If we meet CIPA, are we free to allow minors Internet use without parental consent?

Sandy Messick  
Director of Library Services  
Woodruff Memorial Library

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If you meet CIPA, you meet CO req's. The library may establish its own policies regarding internet access for minors. There's nothing I know of in the law that stipulates that parental consent is required if the library meets internet protection rules. It's a local choice how to allow it (or not).

Eugene Hainer  
Director  
Colorado State Library

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When I worked at Garfield County Public Libraries we changed from a system where guardians had to sign a permission slip for their children under 18 to use the Internet. When we received the permission slip we placed a sticker on their library card noting that Internet use was OK for them. We changed to a system where minors did not have to have parental permission in order to use the Internet. One of the reasons that we did this was because we felt that we were providing a false sense of security to parents and that we were promising to do something that we could not guarantee that we could do (keep their minor children off the Internet). Children often found ways to get on the Internet without the sticker (too many ways to list here) and we felt we could be held liable. We were worried that the change would be met with a lot of protest but it was not. We had signs up in the library notifying

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patrons of the change and I think we might have even put something in the paper. We also used a lot of the same language in the Douglas County Document to explain our decision and to provide information on how to be safe using the Internet. This decision took a lot of stress off of staff. They no longer had to monitor minors usage of the computer, hold library cards until the minor was done using the computer, nor did they have to say "No" as often. I'm not sure what they are doing now but while I was there it seemed to be a good solution and one that I would continue to support in a public library.

Mindy Kittay  
Finance Director  
Rangeview Library District