Libraries As Safer Spaces

What Is A Safer Space?

We say 'safer' realizing that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way as others, so any one set of guidelines established to create safety may not meet the requirements of everyone and there may be complications or lapses in fulfilling those guidelines in practice.

It is nearly impossible for any space to be truly and completely safe.

We can't control everything, the way people feel, and how people may act - so safe spaces are highly unlikely, which is why we try to create spaces that are safer.

Let's Start Here

The most important element in a space that's safer or the most dangerous element in a space that's not is always the people in it.

We need to start with ourselves first:

-acknowledge our biases
-increase our own competence
-listen & learn

Passive Safe Space Making

-What are the first things you see when you walk in?

-What might signal to someone they are safe there?

-Can they feel confident there will be follow-through?

-Are you consistent with your messaging, values, and actions?

-Language, language, language!

-Are your facilities welcoming and accessible?

Do We Need A Policy?

- Makes a statement and shows we're serious

- Allows us to back up any actions we may take

- Sets the tone for conduct

- Puts the issues on people's minds

Safer Space Policy Alternatives

- Visual signifiers all are welcome
- Diverse & inclusive programming
- Crisis de-escalation training
- Accessible facilities
- What else?

What A Policy Won't Do

-Keep oppressive people at home

-Undo a lifetime's worth of cultural lessons

-Make your space automatically safer

-Make a space totally safe

-Enforce itself

Institutional Resistance/Limitations

- Lack of resources
- Community pushback
- Unsupportive administration
- What else?

Backing It Up/Processes

-How will concerns be able to be raised?

-What is the process when a concern is voiced?

-How will you take action?

-How much follow-up will you provide?

-Are you prepared to kick people out?

-What supports are available?

Response Process

Responding to report/request for help:

- Ensure safety for all

- Find another person/helper

- Listen to the complainant/ask their needs

- Take swift action

- Debrief

Victim-Centred Responses

When approached by someone who has experienced harassment, *being their advocate is your number one priority*.

What is victim-blaming?

Why do people victim-blame?

How can I avoid blaming the victim?

Say This, Not That

Ask "what" and "how" questions.

- Are you ok?

- Can I call someone for you?

- How are you feeling?

- Who did this to you?

- How can I help you?

- How do you feel about that?

- Do you feel comfortable telling me what happened?

Say This, Not That

Do NOT ask "how" or "why" questions.

- What did you think would happen?

- What were you wearing?

- Why were you talking to them?

- Are you sure?

- Do you remember that correctly?

- Did you tell them to stop?

- What were you thinking?

- Why did you say/do that?

Crisis De-escalation

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

HOW DO I DE-ESCALATE SOMEONE IN CRISIS?

· Use one of these grounding techniques with the person in crisis:
o Take deep breaths
o Say 5 things you see, 5 things you hear and 5 things you feel – this requires sitting silently and focusing on present surroundings
o Say the following: "I am _____. I am sitting in a chair/standing/etc. I am safe right now." Repeat as needed.
o Focus on the weight of your body on the chair/ your feet on the ground, hair falling on your shoulders/in your face, etc.
o Take off your shoes and rub your feet on the ground
· Be warm and empathetic while you **listen** to them
· Validate their feelings by using phrases such as, "I believe you" "It's not your fault" "You have the right to be safe in this venue"
· Offer resources and referrals to Safer Spaces Winnipeg and other organizations, and make sure to ask the victim what they would like to see happen

Questions/Workshopping

What do barriers to safer spaces look like for you?