

A MESSAGE TO OUR PATRONS

Your Privacy is Important to Us

Our library is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of our patrons. Why?

Because we believe that freedom of speech is meaningless without the freedom to read. Confidentiality and privacy are essential to these freedoms, because if library users have to worry about being judged, punished, ostracized, or put under surveillance, they may censor themselves. They may not seek answers to their questions or read the things they want to read, either in print or online. To be free and to govern themselves, people must be able to explore ideas—even controversial ideas—without fear.

If library patrons aren't doing anything wrong, why should they care about privacy?

There are many reasons why patrons might want their privacy and confidentiality protected. Perhaps they have been diagnosed with a disease and want to learn more about it before they tell their children. Perhaps they are suffering from domestic or child abuse and want to find out how to get help. Or perhaps they're planning a European vacation as a surprise gift for their partner or parent.

Privacy isn't about protecting people who are doing bad things. It's about giving our patrons the power to decide for themselves who will know about their reading and research interests. If a patron chooses to share her reading list with her neighbors, that's fine; but we can't assume everyone wants that.

But what if someone *is* doing something wrong, and the police need to see their library records to investigate a crime?

Librarians comply with law enforcement requests for information about patrons—as long as those requests come in the form of court orders. This ensures that a third party has considered whether the information is really critical for the investigation and helps prevent unnecessary invasions of privacy.

Questions?

Please speak with the library director or a member of the library staff.

"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which Knowledge gives."

James Madison
From James Madison's
"Advice to My Country"
(1997)

"We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted."

From the
American Library
Association
Code of Ethics

Prepared by the Vermont Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee.
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