

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT  
FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS**

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# **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS**

**HILDA K. WEISBURG**

**FOREWORD BY  
GAIL K. DICKINSON**

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**HILDA K. WEISBURG** was a school librarian for more than thirty years and is now an author, speaker, and adjunct instructor at William Paterson University. She co-authored fourteen books for school librarians (with Ruth Toor), several of which were published by ALA Editions. These include *Being Indispensable: A School Librarian's Guide to Becoming an Invaluable Leader* (2011) and *New on the Job: A School Library Media Specialist's Guide to Success* (2007); in 2013, she published *The School Librarian's Career Planner*, which was her first work without Ruth (who has fully retired). Hilda has since authored a second edition of *New on the Job* (2014), which has been an ALA best-seller since its 2007 publication. For thirty-five years she co-wrote and edited *School Librarian's Workshop*, a bimonthly newsletter for K–12 librarians. She has given presentations at ALA, AASL, and state library conferences and presented staff development workshops in many locations. A past president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, she is a past chair of the AASL Advocacy committee, chairs the Ruth Toor Grant for Strong Public Libraries, and serves on ALA committees. Hilda was the recipient of AASL's 2016 Distinguished Service Award.

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## Foreword

I am honored to write the foreword to this book. Managing the enterprise of the school library is one of the most important challenges for school librarians, yet the topic is buried in discussions of other subjects and when it is addressed, the focus is solely on classroom management during the design and delivery of instruction. In the decades since I started my first professional position, libraries have become larger and more complex, and the importance of developing an open and accessible culture in the library remains crucial. Hilda Weisburg and I have discussed this topic many times. Winning the trust of principals and classroom teachers often depends not on the quality of the resources or the innovativeness of the services but rather on the relationships that school librarians build with their communities. As one who has been involved in the school library community at many levels, I believe that this book on managing those relationships—and most importantly, relationships with students—is long overdue.

No matter how long a beginning school librarian has taught in the classroom, no matter how skilled a classroom teacher they were, it's different in the library. Classroom teachers make plans for the group of students they know they will have. They have schedules and structures. School librarians can only guess who will walk in the door—will it be a student or a teacher?

They don't know about the next question they will be asked or the next topic they will be researching. Great school librarians truly see the students not as topics, grade levels, or assignments, but rather as individuals whom they have come to know over a series of grade levels and subject areas. School librarians should be the first people asked to participate in child study teams, because the picture they see is not the same one classroom teachers see.

As Hilda discusses in the first few chapters, sometimes the students are not the only ones who will need some focused classroom management strategies. Most school librarians must manage both the behaviors and the expectations of their peer teachers. Look closely at chapters 3 and 4 for good strategies for working with peer classroom teachers to exploit the resources and services of the school library.

For both students and teachers, a major contributor to negative actions is boredom. Active students will always find something to do, be it positive or negative. And, as noted in chapter 6, sometimes students are defiant. Great school librarians make the library a place where students can explore, are intrigued, and can lose themselves in tasks. As Hilda notes, emergency plans are key for stabilizing inflammatory situations. We cannot control everything that happens in the library or what students have experienced before they walk in the door. We can only address the outcomes of their behavior.

This book will be at the side of school librarians as they seek to build resources and services for all students.

## Introduction

**W**hen I first conceived of this book, I was thinking of the pre-service school librarians I teach. In my experience, they are eager to learn but may not recognize the special challenges that come with managing the school library classroom. The preponderance of them are classroom teachers who are moving into new roles as school librarians. They believe they know how to manage a classroom. But what they will do in the library classroom is different and far more complex than what they've done in the classroom.

As I discussed this book with other librarians, they eagerly seized on the topic. It was soon apparent that this book was not written just for new librarians, but for all school librarians. Those of you who have been librarians for years will be familiar with much of what will be discussed, but there will be ideas and techniques that will be new to you.

You may recognize some ideas from *Leading for School Librarians: There Is No Other Option* (2017), but in that book I focused on how librarians can become leaders.<sup>1</sup> In *Classroom Management for School Librarians*, the emphasis is on managing your environment. Its premise is that your library is your classroom, and you are responsible for everything that happens there.

## MENTORS

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As a school librarian, you are expected to know everything there is to know about running and managing a school library program. Yet the people who expect that have little or no idea what your full responsibilities are. A new teacher is not expected to be able to hit the ground running. Their grade level or subject area colleagues can help. That is not true for school librarians.

Only another librarian can understand your situation and challenges, but in most schools you will be the only librarian in the building. If you are new to the profession, seek out a mentor. If you are experienced, find a buddy. You need someone who can be a guide or a listener.

If you are certified through an alternate route that allows you to teach without going through the standard four-year course, you may be assigned a mentor, usually a teacher in your school. This person may be helpful in navigating school procedures but is not a librarian. In this case, you'll need two mentors.

The purpose of a mentor is to guide you as you grow into your full role as a school librarian. Determine which means of communication your mentor prefers and do your best to accommodate it. Be mindful of—and grateful for—your mentor's time.

See if your state library association has a mentorship program and take advantage of it. If not, you must find your own mentor. Consider officers in your state's library association or those who contribute regularly to the association's electronic discussion list or social media platforms. Reach out to one of them. You may think they are too busy or too important to mentor you, but you will be amazed to discover what a helpful, supportive profession this is.

## YOUR PHILOSOPHY

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Your philosophy, mission, and vision make up a three-legged stool that forms a firm support for your program. You may have some of this in your head, but you need to have them in written form for yourself and others.

Begin by formulating your philosophy. There are numerous titles for what we do. We are called school librarians, teacher librarians, and school library media specialists. The name is not important. What is important is who you are and what you stand for. Knowing this keeps you confident and focused as you manage your shifting roles and responsibilities.

Begin by identifying your core values. What do you think is most important and vital to a school library program? A good place to start is the following six Common Beliefs in the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*:<sup>2</sup>

1. The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community.
2. Qualified school librarians lead effective school libraries.
3. Learners should be prepared for college, career, and life.
4. Reading is the core of personal and academic competency.
5. Intellectual freedom is every learner's right.
6. Information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available.

Which of these stand out for you? What would you add to your personal list? You need to be clear in your mind about what you believe the library is and what you want it to become. Jot down your thoughts and use them to write your own philosophy statement. You can include what the library should be as well as what the librarian brings to the program.

The completed philosophy statement should be somewhere between two paragraphs and one full page. Because it will be too long to post and share with those who come to the library, use one of the word cloud apps to create a picture of your philosophy and hang that in a prominent place in the library.

## YOUR MISSION

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Every librarian needs to have both a mission statement and a vision statement, posted where all can see them. As the second leg of that three-legged stool, your mission statement declares your purpose. Why are you here? What makes you indispensable to the school community?

Your philosophy is your foundation. Your mission is your motivation—and your perspiration. It's why you do what you do. You should be proud every time you see it.

I have discussed writing your philosophy statement as well as your vision statement in my earlier books. I hope you already have written one, but it's always good to review your mission statement and see if it needs any tweaks. Write it in the present tense. It's not about what you will do in the future. It's about what you are doing now. Don't use the conditional tense. Again, it's not about what you should do, it's what you're doing. Don't minimize it.

I have seen long mission statements that include bulleted statements detailing how the mission will be realized. I prefer to limit the statement to no more than fifty words. This allows it to be easily framed and hung—and you can memorize it. When you know your mission statement by heart, it stays with you all the time.

Your mission statement promotes the library program as essential. It shows that the library is unique and can't be replaced by anything or anyone. If some other teacher in the school covers what you have included, you are redundant.

Avoid weak words. Saying you *support*, *extend*, or *complement* the curriculum is nice, but in tough times the administration can do without it. Being *integral* to achieving curricular goals is more powerful.

You will find many examples of mission statements in my earlier book, *Leading for School Librarians*.<sup>3</sup> Here are another two examples to consider:

The mission of the school library program is to achieve district and curricular goals, address diverse learning and teaching styles of students and faculty, enabling them to become effective users and producers of information by providing them with the technology, resources and guidance they need to stay informed in a rapidly changing world and thrive in a collaborative and productive environment.

The Library Media Program teaches effective and ethical uses of information, develops critical thinking, fosters and promotes independent reading, provides equitably accessible media sources to all users, and builds personal and social responsibility.

If you are trying to reach your administrators through your mission statement, choose words and terms that are part of their vocabulary. For example, in the last example the phrase “independent reading” is used. But administrators are more concerned with literacy. Instead say, “fosters and promotes literacy through independent reading.”

Before deciding that your mission statement is complete, review your school and any district goals. Does it include words that you could include in your statement? Aligning your mission statement with the larger school or district goals demonstrates that you are an integral part of the educational community, and that what you do furthers their aims.

In addition to informing others about the unique and vital role of the library program and educating them about your role, the mission statement will help you to focus your own decision-making. It’s your touchstone for determining where you want to go, whether to introduce a new program, and who to target for your advocacy. As much as possible all your work should be related to carrying out your mission.

## YOUR VISION

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Your vision statement is the third leg of the stool. It represents your aspirations and inspirations. It captures an exciting view of what the library program can offer.

Your vision statement shows what your library program would be like in the best of all possible worlds. How do you want others to perceive you? What do you ultimately want to achieve? What messages should the library send?

Even if there's an existing vision statement (and if you do have one, you'll probably need to revise it), make sure it's written in the present tense. This gives it immediacy. Keep it to no more than fifty words so it, too, can be memorized, framed, and hung on your library wall.

Writing a vision statement is more challenging than writing a mission statement. It's hard to reach for something you believe is unattainable, but if you don't put it out there's absolutely no chance that it will be realized.

*Leading for School Librarians* gives sample vision statements for you to work with, but here are three more examples:<sup>4</sup>

The Blank School Library Media Program is the center of collaborative learning producing creative students who have an appreciation of literature, critical thinking skills, and a respect for others and self, and who are prepared to make a contribution to the world.

The school library media program is a safe, open, accessible and inviting learning library commons, essential to student achievement, citizenship and support the principles of intellectual freedom. Our students think globally and are capable of creating new knowledge.

The Blank Elementary School Library Media Center is the hub for educational resources utilized by students and staff members. With literacy as its core, our Library Media Program stimulates curiosity, innovation, and the skills and techniques forming the foundation for lifetime learning.

Review your vision statement at the start of every school year. Have you taken any steps towards achieving it? What could you try this year that will bring you closer? Consider applying for grants that might fund your efforts.

Whether you're a new or an experienced librarian, you are now ready to explore the challenges of classroom management in the library setting. You will never be bored. Every day will be different. Whether you are at the elementary, middle, or high school level, you will learn something new each day. The demands are many, but the rewards are greater.

## NOTES

1. Hilda K. Weisburg, *Leading for School Librarians: There Is No Other Option* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2017).
2. American Association of School Libraries, *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, 2018, 11–14.
3. Weisburg, *Leading for School Librarians*, 14–18.
4. Weisburg, *Leading for School Librarians*, 21.

# 1

## The Library Classroom— It's Different

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**W**hy do school librarians need a book on classroom management targeted specifically to them? A classroom is a classroom. Teaching is teaching. Both are true—and yet far from the truth. Those of you who are classroom teachers have been working with students for some time. If you are new to education, of course, you would want to learn about this. But why is this book just for school librarians? The reason is that there are many factors, from the physical space to the way you meet with students, that make the library very different from a regular classroom. The library comes with a new set of challenges. For your library program to succeed, you need to become comfortable with these challenges and know how to deal with them.

A classroom is designed to hold about thirty students. Although there may be bookcases for a classroom collection, a cart with computers or Chromebooks, and even some comfortable seating, it is still basically a rectangle that is designed so students will focus on a teacher at the front of the room. A library is far larger. It has more shelves, display areas, and different types of lounge furniture. At the elementary level, there will be a section for story listening. A library may have DVDs, magazines, a green wall or possibly a makerspace, as well as other features common in school libraries today. And that's just what the students normally see. There is also usually an office and a workroom area.

In short, it doesn't look anything like a classroom. It encourages exploration which will motivate your students to discover and learn. At the same time, the open space provides opportunities for students to get lost in the stacks, avoid work, and occasionally cause trouble.

Classroom teachers at the elementary level meet with their students every day, all day, except for "specials" such as prep periods and when students go to art, music, and gym classes—and to the library. An elementary librarian may only see students from every grade level once a week for 30 to 45 minutes. In some districts these may be scheduled once every six days or less. Holidays and snow days can stretch out the time between sessions even further. This could be once every six days or even less frequently. Getting to know each student is not easy. Nor is it a simple matter to fit in time for lessons, book selection, checkout, and book returns before the next class arrives.

In middle and high schools, unless you have a special course to teach, you'll have even less frequent contact. You see students when the teachers bring in their classes. You can easily have a senior English class, followed by an ELL class, and then a French II class. Sometimes two or three of these disparate classes will be in the library simultaneously.

Depending on the connections you have made with teachers, students may come in for only a single day for you to introduce the research process, or for several days in a row, perhaps with you and the teacher working together. Sometimes a teacher just brings in a class and doesn't want you to do anything. There is no one set way. It will be different from one teacher to another. How this goes very much depends on how proactive you are and how successfully you develop relationships with teachers.

Regardless of grade level, when classes come into your library you won't be working with your own students. It's hard to get to know them all. At a large middle or high school, it is impossible to do so. Older students recognize this, and some will not acknowledge your authority the way they do with their teachers. Students in upper grades like to find places where they won't be seen. With younger students, it can feel like you're herding cats because they want to spread throughout the library.

## MANAGEMENT VERSUS CONTROL

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In my previous book, *Leading for School Librarians*, I devoted a chapter to managing classes in the library. It's worth reviewing what was covered there before going into greater detail.<sup>1</sup> What do you do when twenty-five or more students come into your library at once? Whether they are dropped off by elementary teachers or accompanied by middle or high school teachers, they are in your space. You are responsible.

If you are unsure of yourself, your instinctive reaction is to try to control these situations, and that's where you make your first mistake. The title of this book is *Classroom Management for School Librarians*. The keyword is *management*—not control.

The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines *control* as “to exercise restraining or dominating influence over” and “to have power over.”<sup>2</sup> By contrast, it defines *management* as “to work upon or try to alter for a purpose” and “to succeed in accomplishing.”<sup>3</sup> (Note that I carefully chose particular definitions to highlight the difference between the two words.)

Obviously, you want to manage student behavior, not control it. If you are uncertain of what you are doing—if you don't know how to manage students and other challenges when they arise, you move into fight or flight mode, which inevitably means trying to control the situation. Once you do that, you have, in fact, lost control.

Even more than classroom teachers, librarians face more challenges in managing their environment. You need to develop tools to keep you calm and capable of confidently managing your school library.

Think of how you feel when you are thrust into a challenging situation. Can you sense your body tightening or have a sinking feeling in your stomach? Body language communicates even more than words. In the various scenarios that will be discussed, it's the nonverbal communication that must be understood and mastered.

Be mindful of your body's reactions. To dispel the need to control, when you feel that panic, take a few deep breaths (shallow breathing intensifies fear). Have a short phrase that states something you know is true and repeat it in your mind. Draw on your philosophy. As discussed in the introduction, this is the statement of your core values. Do you believe every student can learn? Do you want the library to be a safe, welcoming environment? Your short phrase then might be “I know how to make their learning fun/engaging” or “They are all welcome here.”

Feel your shoulders relax as you silently repeat your phrase one or twice. Smile, and mean it. Look students in the eye as you do so. Make a welcoming comment to one or more students as they enter or settle into their places.

You are now managing the situation. The kids will respond to that. We are innately conditioned to trust a leader who is in charge. By contrast, we will drift like a rudderless boat when the leader doesn't seem able to lead. When you know how to manage yourself, you won't need to control. The more you worry about discipline, the less likely you are to have it.

At all levels, you must make connections to the students. The library must be a safe, welcoming space for all. Everything you do must advance that. When interacting with students—and with teachers, administrators, and others—always keep that in mind.

## USING YOUR POWER

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Do you feel uncomfortable with the idea of using power? What does power mean to you? Many people have a negative reaction to it. They immediately go to the authoritarian use of power, which seems out of place in a school, particularly in a library where you want to create a safe, welcoming—and even nurturing—environment.

Power in and of itself is neither negative nor positive. What matters is how power is used. In *Leading for School Librarians*, I discussed the Five Bases of Social Power proposed by John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Russell.<sup>4</sup> They defined power as the ability to cause someone to do something and defined five types of power:

- *Legitimate*. The power wielded by a person in authority who has a title such as “principal.”
- *Coercive*. The power of someone with the ability to punish.
- *Reward*. The power held by someone who has the ability to reward.
- *Expert*. The power comes from a person who is knowledgeable about something that others need to know.
- *Referent*. The power based on the charisma of a person you to work with.

Teachers and librarians, to varying degrees, have legitimate, coercive, and reward power, which are negative powers. It may seem as though reward power would be positive, but it’s the carrot on a stick. The implied threat is if you don’t do what the person in authority wants, the reward will be taken away and be replaced by punishment, or coercive power.

The expert and referent powers are more likely to be positive in nature. As a librarian you have a lot of expert power, but this power can be short term. Once the person learns what they need or want to know, the expert power disappears. The most long-term and strongest of the five is referent power. It will come into play in managing the library classroom because it rests on your ability to create and sustain relationships with the educational community.

An understanding of how to use power positively is vital to your success. As the adult in charge of the library, you are the one in power. How you use it sets the tone for your library. There are teachers who use their power to control their students. You undoubtedly have come across a few of them in your own educational experiences. But you don’t want control. For one thing, control is contrary to the environment that you must create in your library.

There are multiple ways to look at power beyond what French and Russell defined. PowerCube offers three expressions of power: Power Over, Power Within, and Power With.<sup>5</sup> These are simple to understand and are an excellent explanation of the dynamics in play within a classroom and other settings.

Because almost all social interactions have elements of power intertwined within them, this is another way to look at power undercurrents and to see how to effectively use the positive ones to improve your classroom management and create the library atmosphere you want.

Power Over means using your position to exert control. It is authoritarian in nature. Much like legitimate, coercive, and reward powers, it suppresses initiative, produces resentment, and often results in rebellion. You have seen it in action, possibly experiencing it yourself in your own student days or when interacting with a supervisor.

In a challenging situation, it is almost instinctive to use Power Over, but it will undermine whatever positives you are building. When this happens, and it invariably does, you can minimize the damage by apologizing. Students are not accustomed to adults admitting they made a mistake. When you apologize to students, you are giving them a lesson in how to respond when they slip up.

Power Within is based on trust in yourself. It is rooted in self-confidence. You can feel it inside you as you go through your day. When you love what you do and believe in its value and importance, you can draw on it in your interactions. By definition, it allows you to manage situations. This is where your positive mindset comes from.

When you exude Power Within, others recognize that you are confident, which leads to trust. Trust is a core foundation for relationships, and relationships with students, teachers, and the educational community are vital to your success. Students are far more likely to listen to and follow you when they feel you know what you are doing.

Power With is even stronger. It is an outgrowth of Power Within. When you are confident, you can easily connect with others and draw out their best. When you have Power With, you can engage people to work with you towards a goal. To some extent it is related to referent power. When you interact with teachers, it is Power With that leads to collaboration. When you work with students, it generates trust. If you foster students' Power With you encourage their initiative and curiosity, engaging them in learning that's meaningful to them.

Don't forget that power is always at play in social interactions. This means students are using their power, mostly unknowingly.

## **CHILDREN'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

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As a librarian you can't be sure about the grade levels you will be teaching. You may envision yourself as an elementary librarian but find yourself in a middle school. Depending on how your degree reads, you may be able to work at all grade levels. And, unlike classroom teachers, you will be dealing with multiple grades no matter the level of your school.

As children progress from kindergarten through high school they go through constant changes in their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. It's important to be aware of these changes and the factors that affect students' behavior. The more you recognize what is going on inside their heads and bodies, the better you will be at managing the library classroom.

On its website, the California Department of Education has a page for Ages and Stage of Development, beginning with birth and going through age fourteen.<sup>6</sup> I have drawn from its summary for my discussion below.

## **K-1**

Physically, these children are seemingly always in motion. Their hands and feet never stop. When you set up your expectations you will include something to indicate they should keep their hands and feet to themselves. Even older students need that reminder.

You can't expect students at this age to sit for long periods of time (fifteen minutes is too long) without some type of break. Mentally, they are curious about the world around them. They constantly ask, "Why?" It's important not to squelch their inquisitiveness as it is the basis of all learning. The library is a place of discovery. Allow them opportunities to do so.

Their minds seem to flit from one thought to another. They are masters of the non sequitur. If you ask a question about the story you are reading, one of the students is apt to say something like, "My aunt just had a baby." You can go to Power Over and say, "That's not what we are talking about," or you can use Power With to say, "How exciting," and then repeat your question.

## **Grades 2-3**

By second grade, students are more attuned to school as part of their lives. They are no longer always in motion. Homework becomes important along with how they are doing compared to their peers. They can become easily frustrated, resulting in small or large displays of temper. Be prepared to defuse these situations with supportive solutions. Begin to develop a bag of tricks that work for you and your student population.

Socially, students are becoming more distinct individuals and forming friendships, which also bring arguments. Storytime should be about more than just about the story. You can use it to teach kindness and how to cope with anger and frustration. If you have identified a particular problem students are experiencing when they are dealing with emotions or "failure," find stories that will guide them into understanding how to manage these situations.

As part of the classroom management plan you will create, include a realistic series of consequences to respond to students who are acting out. Start by giving them a quick look to remind them that they are not behaving well or are causing a distraction. Asking a question moves the student from where

they are to where they need to be. Eventually, you will have a collection of strategies that will resolve most situations. Chapter 6 goes into more detail on handling disruptions.

### **Grades 4–6**

Behaviors and physical development begin to range more widely. Some children still act like second graders while some fifth and sixth graders are in the early stages of puberty. They are more likely not to accept a rule for its own sake. Be sure they understand the reasons for it.

Children at this age want to be “big.” They like feeling grown up and doing things older kids do. If at all possible, this is a great age to begin having student volunteers. They love working in the library and are usually conscientious.

Research projects based on their interests, such as clothing and music, will engage them. Although inquiry-based learning can and should begin at the primary level, these are brief forays. This is when they can begin developing research strategies.

## **ADOLESCENTS' GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

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You either love working with adolescents or hate it. Regardless, you need to get a handle on what is going on inside them. The American Psychological Association's *Developing Adolescents: A Resource for Professionals* is another resource you should bookmark and consult as needed.<sup>7</sup>

Working with adolescents can be an exhilarating experience or a minefield depending on how you view it. Emotions are on display—full out. On the other hand, you can have fun with them. They get the jokes.

You can watch them evolving into the adults they are going to be. The road is not straight and is often fraught with angst. This is an enduring subject of YA fiction and in the creative writing of students. Pecking orders and cliques are common. Long-standing friendships break up over them.

Every day is a new crisis. If you speak to students of this age and treat them as though they are adults, you can develop a positive relationship with them. In turn, they will keep you young.

### **Grades 7–9**

This age range is the most challenging as the span between different kids' emotional and physical age varies widely. While the adults are focused on teaching the curriculum, a stew of young adolescent emotions are stirring below the surface. If you develop relationships with your students, you can tune into what they're feeling and help them with some of the turmoil.

Puberty arrives for most students during the years between eleven and fourteen, although sometimes they still sound and act like six-year-olds. They will experience emotional extremes more frequently. Within hours they can move from life is wonderful to life is a disaster. Don't react to the emotion—focus on the content.

Students of this age become more aware of what's going on in the adult world. They may develop an interest in politics and activism. At the same time, this is an age when bullying (including cyberbullying) become a problem. Mean girls are a well-known segment of middle school students. Boys who are not into sports may be targeted.

Sexuality also becomes an issue. Body and sexual changes often cause concerns, voiced or not. In general, the girls will be ahead of the boys, but you still need to be aware of the interplay between and within the genders. Boys who haven't come into their growth spurt or girls who have not begun menstruating feel "less" than others of their age. Body-shaming is common.

Additionally, there are students who are discovering or suspecting they are LGBTQ+. Even in tolerant communities, being discovered or coming out can be frightening. Being different is not comfortable and sometimes not safe. The role of the library as a safe, welcoming space for all becomes more important than ever. In addition to having books that students can see themselves in, occasionally the library needs to be a place where they can hide. Being able to have lunch in the library has been a sanctuary for many.

Risky behaviors tend to begin in this age range. From smoking and vaping to alcohol and drugs, many tweens, begin to experiment. Not wearing bike helmets during this period transitions into reckless driving when they are old enough to get a driver's license. Add early (and later) sexual experimentation and unsafe social networking practices and you can readily see how volatile this time period can be.

The library is a unique environment and you will see the kids in ways the teachers don't. Be alert to signs of potential trouble. Be the trusted adult, and, if necessary, get them to a counselor. Because you don't want to violate their trust, go to a counselor only as a last resort.

## **Grades 10–12**

Cognitively, high school students are now much better at higher-order thinking skills, but they still need help in thinking critically. Librarians are in a perfect position to guide them by working with teachers to craft projects that require them to learn to assess the validity and relevance of information while creating new knowledge.

All the physical and emotional changes that emerged in middle school continue into high school with the added tension of becoming "college ready." The reality of looming adulthood is both exciting and frightening. Whether they plan to go to college, the military, or enter a career right out of high

school, their days as students are coming to an end. The pressure can be intense, and sometimes exacerbated by parents' expectations and demands.

Adolescents are frustrated by adults' failure to treat them as grown-ups. For them, this means being given more freedom. Parents and teachers feel they are treating them as adults by giving them more responsibilities. It is a disconnect that can't be resolved easily and leads to many arguments between parents and kids as well as some clashes between teachers and students.

Given the behavior and emotional extremes of high school students, it can be difficult to determine if a teenager is heading for trouble or is just manifesting an aspect of typical behavior. *Developing Adolescents: A Resource for Professionals* explains it is normal for adolescents to:

- argue for the sake of arguing
- jump to conclusions
- be self-centered
- constantly find fault in adults' positions
- be overly dramatic<sup>8</sup>

Recognize when they are arguing just to do so, and don't get sucked into it. Some of this is bluster coming from their own uncertainties as well as trying to cope with negative self-esteem while simultaneously wanting to appear grown up.

In your role as librarian, you can help them learn not to jump to conclusions. Don't tell them they are wrong. Rather ask them to prove their belief and guide them in their search. A KWL (what I know, what I want to know, what I learned) chart is a simple and effective tool. They may learn that what they thought they knew wasn't true.

Teenagers' insecurities contribute to them becoming self-centered. Everything is about them. The drama is related to this, as well as to the emotional extremes that are a natural part of adolescence.

Teens continue to engage in the risky behaviors that began in middle school. Now that driving is added to the mix along with more time away from adult supervision, there can be more far-reaching consequences. They are testing limits—theirs and yours—and don't always recognize or fear the dangers. It's often said that adolescents have a sense that they are immortal. Additionally, their brains are not fully developed, and they often can't predict the consequences of actions. Adults sometimes ask teenagers, "What were you thinking?" The honest answer is—they weren't.

I have told my grandsons, "If one of your friends says, 'wouldn't it be great to...,' the answer is 'no.'" More seriously, your ability to develop relationships with students will make you one of their trusted adults, allowing you to sometimes avert one of these risky decisions.

When they trust you, students will sometimes talk to you about personal and other matters. *Developing Adolescents: A Resource for Professionals* offers the following advice for talking with adolescents (the direct quotes are in italics; the comments are not):

- *Listen nonjudgmentally (and listen more than you speak).* Adolescents really need someone who can listen to them rather than talk at them. By listening, you can pluck out the core of the issue, which is likely to be embedded somewhere within what they are saying.
- *Ask open-ended questions.* This is how you guide students into becoming independent thinkers. Your questions should encourage them to reflect on their thoughts, words, and actions. Consider something like, “What do you think might be the result of ....?”
- *Avoid “why” questions*—As noted earlier, they won’t often know why they did something. You’re also challenging them, which can cause them to shut down.
- *Match the adolescent’s emotional state, unless it is hostile.* You don’t want to put a damper on their enthusiasm even if you think it is misplaced. Nor do you want to negate their feeling of being unloved. You start by saying, “I can see how excited (or unhappy) you are.” From there, you can work with them and try to help them explore their feelings and find a more balanced state or resolve a problem.
- *Casually model rational decision-making.* Sharing your own experiences can be helpful. Remember, students at all ages learn more from what we do than what we say. Share your reasoning when appropriate.
- *Discuss ethical and moral problems that are in the news.* This expands their social consciousness and also treats students as adults who have ideas worth sharing. Work with teachers to create projects that give them opportunities to wrestle with difficult issues they’re interested in. It will help them develop empathy and minimize their self-centeredness.<sup>9</sup>

The ups and downs of the teen years notwithstanding, you can accomplish much simply by following the suggestions given in Mary Anne Ware and Jodi Rath’s “Four Must-Haves for Positive Teacher-Teen Relationships.”<sup>10</sup>

*Consistency.* All students need consistency, but none more than teens, whose lives are always at extremes. Consistency grounds them. It reminds them that they know what will happen next. Consistently applied boundaries helps them avoid risky behaviors.

*Respect.* Although respect is necessary for all relationships, starting with the youngest children, it becomes increasingly important with teens. If you don’t give them respect, they won’t give it to you and the likelihood of confrontations increases. Don’t stop a conversation with them because an adult wants to speak with you. That sends the message that you don’t think they are as important.

*High expectations.* This is a form of respect. You are acknowledging the student is capable but show your willingness to help them achieve their goal. Dumbing something down is insulting, and they will recognize it.

*Kindness.* This sounds simple and obvious, but it can easily be overlooked on a busy day. In the words of a wise man, “The world is like a mirror. Smile at it and it will smile back.” This works with teens as much as anyone else. I don’t think I went through a day when I was a high school librarian when I wasn’t thanked at least once by students. And I thanked them often as well.

## REFLECTION

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The library classroom is obviously not the same as a teacher’s classroom, yet it is a classroom. It is where true learning occurs. A parade of students come through its doors and find the help and resources to meet their educational and personal needs.

While they are in that space, they are welcome and safe—safe to explore, discover, and create. The librarian gets to watch and guide students as they grow and develop into the adults they will become.

## KEY IDEAS

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- The library classroom resembles a teacher’s classroom in name only.
- Physically, the library classroom is different from a teacher’s classroom, and this affects student behavior.
- At the elementary level, the librarian meets with different grades and students all day, seeing them, at best, once a week.
- At upper levels, librarians are dependent on teachers bringing in their classes, which are at all grades and subject areas.
- The students are not “yours.” Within the library classroom, they still belong to their teacher, and they know it.
- You need to manage, not control, your library classroom.
- Control is about dominance; management is about working with people (students in this case).
- When you are fearful you try to exert control.
- Your body language communicates more than your words.
- Have a plan to move your mindset from fearing the situation to managing it.
- All social interactions involve some type of power.
- Power in and of itself is neither negative nor positive.
- Power Over is control, not management.

- Power Within comes from self-confidence.
- Power With enables collaboration to occur.
- Understanding the physical, emotional, and cognitive development stages of children from kindergarten through high school allows you to teach and respond to them in a manner appropriate to the appropriate level.
- Primary grade children become socialized to the school environment, become surer in their individual nature, and build friendships,
- By the elementary grades, some children are beginning to enter puberty while others are still little kids.
- Although elementary students tend to get into difficulties because, at this developmental stage, they are physical, adolescents are challenged by and are challenging because of their emotional extremes.
- Middle school is most challenging because the range in physical and emotional development among students is the greatest.
- Body image is important to teens and body shaming becomes a problem along with bullying and cyberbullying.
- The library as a safe, welcoming space becomes extremely important. Some students will use it as a sanctuary during lunch.
- Risky behavior including smoking, drinking, taking drugs, and having sex begin during these years, and the librarian can and should be a “trusted adult” who can help them.
- High school students can better employ high-order thinking skills but don’t always think critically. Well-crafted assignments can help them learn how to do so.
- The imminence of adulthood adds more pressure.
- When dealing with an argumentative, self-absorbed teen, remember that this is normal behavior.
- Develop strategies for talking with teens.
- Remember to listen more than talk, ask questions that require thought, and don’t ask “Why?” They have no idea why.
- Be a role model for good decision-making and engage students in what is happening in the world around them.
- In your dealings with teens, be consistent, give and expect respect, hold them to high standards, and show kindness.

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