

# Guidelines for Library Services to Teens, Ages 12-18

by



## Foreword

These guidelines were created in 2006 by a joint task force of members of both the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). Members of the task force were Sarah Flowers, Helen Hejny, Rosemary Chance, Mary K. Chelton, David Fuller, and Stephen Matthews.

## Introduction

Teens are substantial users of public libraries (NCES, 1995) and the primary users of secondary school libraries. Their presence and numbers, as well as their developmental characteristics and life circumstances present a distinct challenge for reference service providers. During adolescence, teens develop the ability to hypothesize and think about the future and foresee consequences for actions. They also develop personal ethics and critical thinking abilities. At the same time, they are extremely self-conscious, which makes them easily embarrassed. All of these factors combine to make reference service to teens unique and uniquely challenging. It is our hope that these guidelines will help reference librarians in all kinds of libraries provide excellent service to teens.

To learn more about RUSA go to [www.ala.org/rusa](http://www.ala.org/rusa)

To learn more about YALSA go to [www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)

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## **Guidelines**

### **1.0 Integrate library service to teens into the overall library plan, budget and service program.**

It is essential for the leaders and policy makers of the library to understand that service for teens is not a fad; that the need and demand for library services will only increase; that teens have specific library service needs that are different from those of children or adults; and that nothing short of a total moral and financial commitment to library services for teens will meet the needs and demands of the present and future teen library user.

**1.1** Acknowledge the educational and developmental needs of teens in the library's strategic planning and evaluation process.

**1.2** Incorporate funding for materials and services for teens in the library's operating budget.

**1.3** Actively seek supplemental funding for programs and services to teens.

**1.4** Provide spaces and collections for teens that are separate from children's spaces and collections.

### **2.0 Provide teens with courteous and professional customer service at every service point.**

Friendly, positive, and unbiased customer interactions are the goal of every public service provider. This is especially true in the world of libraries, as we strive to offer courteous professional services to all library users. All library customers, regardless of age, benefit when library staff foster a knowledgeable, friendly, and inviting atmosphere.

**2.1** Promote a more beneficial working relationship with teens through continuous staff development and education.

**2.2** Integrate library services to teens with those offered to other user populations.

**2.3** Assure that services for teens embrace cultural diversity and economic differences.

**2.4** Train all staff members to respect the teen's need for privacy and non-judgmental service.

**2.5** Provide services by teen specialists or certified school library media specialists as well as by others who are trained to serve teens.

### **3.0 Use the most current information and communication technologies, the connections that they use on a daily basis, to provide information to teens.**

Online information and electronic communication is a way of life for most teens. They have come of age with the web, the iPod, cable and satellite television, the cell phone, etc., and these tools form a seamless part of their everyday lives. Change and innovation are and will be the defining forces in personal technology so this list of gadgets and interfaces will expand and change as the "ways to be wired" morph and grow. Librarians need to understand how these "digital natives" perceive the world. We need to provide direction, structure, and effective assistance, both when we are asked directly to help as well as when we are not. Sound and savvy instruction in information

literacy and thoughtful design of intuitive and welcoming portals to our virtual libraries are essential allies in serving the needs of teens.

- 3.1** Provide unfettered and convenient access to licensed databases and other online library resources for teens.
- 3.2** Incorporate the use of social networking (e.g., instant messaging, blogs, and social web sites) into service plans that are designed to provide reference services to teens.
- 3.3** Employ in-person as well as digital (on-line tutorials, help screens, search process prompts) methods of information literacy instruction at the point of service.
- 3.4** Develop and promote homework assistance websites/portals as key elements in meeting the information needs of teens.
- 3.5** Ensure that teens receive the same high quality of online reference service as all other users.
- 3.6** Endeavor to make online reference services available 24/7 to accommodate teens' busy lifestyles and often unpredictable study and research habits.

#### **4.0 Provide and promote information and resources appropriate to both curriculum and leisure needs of teens.**

Teens approach the reference desk with two main types of questions: the "imposed" query (usually a school assignment) and the personal query (often a popular culture interest). Maintaining a collection that is relevant to the interests and needs of teens will help to maintain the relevance of the library in their lives. The library's role extends beyond gathering resources to keeping them current and actively seeking means to publicize and promote them. The library should be positioned as a primary access point to information on everything from school curriculum topics to college planning, health issues, career opportunities, and popular culture.

- 4.1** Develop collections to reflect the information needs and interests of teens.
- 4.2** Take the requests of teens seriously, and ask for their input in developing collections for them.
- 4.3** Recognize that homework is a major part of teen information seeking and that homework assistance is a necessary service for this age group.
- 4.4** Recognize that teens often do not know or are not interested in the content of what they are asking, but only know that they have to have it, usually at once.
- 4.5.** Provide a variety of formats for information and resources, such as audio books, databases, internet access, and listening equipment, as well as computer programs such as word processing, spreadsheet, database, and web publishing software for homework assignments, class projects, and recreational use.

#### **5.0 Provide library services and programs appropriate for teens.**

Libraries should provide a community setting for teen programming that will ultimately enable teens to develop new library skills, to become independent and skillful library users and to enjoy traditional informational or recreational programs.

- 5.1** Provide positive programming to meet the needs and interests of teens and their family members as well as opportunities for teens to experience ownership

of the library by contributing collection suggestions and situations in which they can share their expertise (with reading, technology, hobbies etc.)

**5.2** Create activities that promote growth and development such as community service hours, volunteer opportunities and projects that help develop a sense of responsibility.

**5.3** Guide teens to become self-sufficient library users through example and pertinent activities and positive programs specifically designed to meet their interests.

**5.4** Develop programming and services to meet the needs of teens unable to visit the library through technology and outreach.

**5.5** Publicize services and programs for teens in popular local establishments and using current technology trends.

**5.6** Actively involve teens in planning and implementing services and programs for their age group through advisory boards, task forces, and by less formal means (i.e., surveys, one-on-one discussion, focus groups, etc.)

## **6.0 Cultivate partnerships with community agencies and groups serving teens.**

Library programs and services for teens should not replicate those of other agencies, but can complement and support them. Investigate possible joint programs for teens. Identify resources the library can provide to assist professionals who work with teens.

**6.1** Identify community organizations and groups of and for teens.

**6.2** Collaborate with schools in areas such as class assignments, reading lists, and bibliographic instruction to more effectively serve teens with their academic needs.

**6.3** Collaborate with other organizations serving teens such as youth groups and after school programs.

**6.4** Partner with schools and local organizations for library programs and delivery of services.

## **Resources**

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