

# Library Safety

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Librarians have long been on the front lines dealing with the public. Libraries function as both a place of refuge and a symbol of governmental authority. As such they have become magnets for people with behavioral issues and gripes against authority. Recently in a number of high-profile instances public service staff have been injured or killed working in or near their library. I recall a number of years ago, being attacked on the street by a disturbed individual one block from the library where I worked. The individual claimed that I was watching him through eyes in the back of my head. He pulled out a knife and moved toward me in a menacing way. I quickly suggested to him that the person on the other side of the sidewalk also had eyes in the back of their head. Momentarily distracted, I was able to quickly run away. The person ended up stabbing another person several blocks away as the police pulled up. The incident forever changed the way I view other people approaching me. It reminds me that I must always be on the alert in the library to the people around me. This is a reactive approach to the situation what we can also do is a proactive approach and take steps to make our workplaces more secure. Even in the safest places we need to be aware of risks.

There are several ways library places can be made safer in the end. Guards of course can provide some level of protection, but they can't be everywhere all the time. Recently when I had a patron get sick I rang up our guard station, but they were out on patrol, so I had to call the police (our guards carry police contact radios). I know one library that has a six-foot-three, ex-military support staff member who helps with problem patrons. Training staff is important. Having "active shooter" drills help staff remember what to do in case of trouble. Be informed about what to do. If you see something, call it in. Always be on the alert for possible dangers. Learn where at least two nearby exits are and know how to get their fast if need be. Be

thinking about what your library could do to help disabled patrons/staff escape. During an active incident: "Run, Hide, Fight" as needed. A suggestion I had not thought of, but makes great sense, is to not hide in groups. Groups make it easier for someone to kill large numbers of people. Spread out as much as possible. Stay safe and obey the instructions of security forces. The library I work at has installed security buttons on phones. All you have to do, is press the button and the police respond. You don't have to say anything over the phone. This could be a help if needed.

Having said this, we don't need to become afraid of coming to work in the library. Libraries are still very safe places to work for the most part. Be aware of your surroundings but like any place open to the public that safety can be compromised and plan your escape route if needed.

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