

HOW TO RESPOND TO CONFLICTS WITH YOUR ADMINISTRATION

For more information, check out the “Legal FAQs” in the Additional Resources online.

Don't forget to review the training you received on getting approval from admin on pages 157 of the Outreach Guide.

Common Responses to Outreach Requests:

REASONS FOR DENIAL

.....

“Your date conflicts with another event.”

“Your request is denied. We need more notice.”

“You cannot reserve that room for your rally.” (There is no conflict with another event, but the administration simply will not let you reserve the room.)

“You can have your event, but only if you limit the religious content.”

See page 114 for specific legal information on indoor and outdoor rallies.

YOUR RESPONSE

.....

Pick another date. Ask your administration if they can recommend a good time.

Re-submit your request for a different date that would comply with the amount of notice needed. It is always good to keep in mind that an administration can deny any request that does not follow the school's policies and procedures.

If no students can reserve the room, then you should probably try to find a different one. However, if other students have been allowed to reserve the room during the year, then you need to remind them of that and stand up for your rights (more on that below). The same applies for reserving outside areas like the quad. If there are no restrictions placed on other groups, then they must allow the Christian club to reserve it as well.

First, ask for clarification so you can be totally clear on what your school wants. If you trying to set up an outdoor rally where students do not have a choice as to whether they will attend your rally, then you should probably just go along with what your school asks of you. Of course, even in an outdoor setting, it is generally fine for you to talk about God as long as a speaker uses first person language. (Example: I realized that I was a sinner and felt that I needed to make a decision to accept Christ as my Lord.) You may want to continue dialogue with your administration if you feel that their limitations are unreasonable. However, if you are trying to set up an indoor rally where students can freely choose if they want to attend or not, then you absolutely need to stand up for your rights. It is blatant discrimination for your administration to keep you from having an event with religious content.

When you need to stand up for your rights.

While maintaining love and respect for your administration, you must be prepared to defend your right to share the gospel if it is challenged. If the above responses don't resolve the situation, you may be facing religious discrimination, and you need to take a stand.

Defending your rights is not just for you. Rather, it's for everyone who will hear the gospel this year and for the Christian club at your school for years to come. Always keep in mind that God is not done with your school and you are laying a foundation for others to build on. Look at the way Paul used his legal rights:

Paul claims his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid a flogging.

"But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?' When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.' So the tribune came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' And he said, 'Yes.' So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him" (Acts 22:25-27,29).

Like Paul, you need to help your administration see that it is breaking the law by denying your basic rights as a student in America. It is frequently possible to resolve these conflicts with very little drama, while keeping peace with your principal. So when you encounter a problem, be respectful and courteous as you follow these steps to stand up for your rights on your campus.

Step 1

Talk to your advisor.

Go over your concerns and give your advisor a copy of the PJI booklet if you have not done so already. Your advisor can be a powerful ally in getting problems resolved.

However, if your advisor is not able to help, proceed to the next step.

Step 2

Request a meeting with the person who denied your request.

Go talk to the activities coordinator, the ASB president, or whoever denied your request. At the meeting, express your concerns and defend why you believe that your club's activities are in the right.

If this meeting does not resolve the situation to your satisfaction or you cannot get a meeting set up to begin with, then proceed to the next step.

Step 3

Request a meeting with the principal.

Express your concerns and see if the principal will step in and give your club the permission that you need.

Again, if this meeting does not resolve the situation to your satisfaction or you cannot get a meeting set up to begin with, then proceed to the next step.

Step 4

Contact the Pacific Justice Institute and ask them for help. The Pacific Justice Institute is easy to get in contact with and they can offer you free assistance if you simply fill out a web form on their website. Very few problems ever escalate to this step, but when it does, PJI will sometimes make a phone call to the school on your behalf to inform the administration of your rights and that they are ready to defend those rights if need be. Such a phone call usually fixes any remaining problems very quickly. To get in touch with the Pacific Justice Institute, just fill out the online form at <http://www.pacificjustice.org/request-legal-assistance.html>. A helpful, friendly lawyer will contact you to discuss your situation and provide you the information and support you need. (Note that it can take up to 2 weeks for a response – depending on how busy they are – so don't wait too long if you think you need to contact PJI.) While you wait for a response, prepare for your conversation by writing down exactly what happened with your request, your administration's response, and your next steps. Additionally, research your school's policies and rules for clubs, speakers, and events. These are things that PJI will be interested to discuss.

What does a conversation involving standing up for your rights look like?

Below are two sample dialogues that are based off real conversations that students have had with their administrations. Obviously, every dialogue will look different, but this is a great example of what you might expect.

Sample 1

A student requests a meeting with the school's activities coordinator, who had initially denied the club's request to host a rally.

.....

Student: Hi Miss Anderson. Thanks for seeing us today! We really appreciated you taking the time to look at our event and give us some feedback. Can I ask you a few questions?

Miss Anderson: Sure. Go ahead!

Student: You told our club that our event in the quad was denied because of its religious nature. If you don't mind our asking, why is that a problem?

Miss Anderson: You need to understand that there is separation of church and state. I am happy for you that you have religious beliefs. I am a religious person myself! However, it is not appropriate for students to be proselytizing at public lunch events.

Student: Well, we certainly do not want to cause trouble for you, Miss Anderson. We really appreciate all that you do! However, we did our homework before we submitted our request, and we know that it is legally okay for one of our students to share her personal testimony about God because of the 1st Amendment. Plus, students from ASB use the microphone all the time at lunch. Can I show you where we saw this in the law?

Miss Anderson: I saw the letter you turned in. Of course you have free speech, but this is different. You can't be telling students that they need to believe in Jesus at lunch.

Student: Well, our speaker, Sarah, was just going to share her story. She was not going to tell anyone that they needed to believe in Jesus. Is there any problem with that?

Miss Anderson: I'm sorry, but I just can't allow it.
(Note: You could press this issue further if you wanted to, but in this case, the student is going to go for a compromise. Remember that outdoor areas are a bit of a gray area, so choosing to move the event inside is a great idea.)

Student: Would there be a problem if we hosted our event in the gymnasium instead? Then maybe we could just use the PA system to invite students to come and listen to Sarah's story.

Miss Anderson: I'm sorry. There is just this whole separation of church and state thing. No, you cannot hold your event. That is final.

Student: I see. Well, thank you for your time.

(Having not resolved the issue, the student will move onto the next step.)

Sample 2

Because the student could not resolve the conflict by talking with the activities coordinator, the student seeks a meeting with the principal.

.....

Student: Hello Principal Torrez. Thanks for meeting with us on such short notice.

Principal: No problem. I took it very seriously when you said that Miss Anderson was preventing your club from exercising its religious freedoms at our school. Can you please tell me more about what this is all about?

Student: Our club submitted a request to host a week of special club meetings, but Miss Anderson does not want to approve them because of their religious nature.

Principal: What was it that you specifically wanted to do?

Student: One of our club members, Sarah, was going to share her story of starting a relationship with God. We wanted students to be encouraged by her story and see our club as a place where they could learn more about God too.

Principal: Miss Anderson likely denied your event because of the separation of church and state.

Student: Well, we did our homework before submitting our request, and we actually confirmed that legally we have the right to host an event in line with the purpose of our club. Here it is.

Principal: Ah, I see. Well, I think this should be okay. Miss Anderson was just being cautious, but I will tell her to give you full permission. As your event gets closer, please continue to give her more information about exactly what is going to be happening. Our school has never had an event like this before.

Student: We'll be sure to do so! Thanks, Mr. Torrez!

(In this case the situation was resolved, but if it had not been, the students could have contacted the Pacific Justice Institute for further help.)

Separation of Church and State

Usually, when people refer to the 'separation of church and state', they think of a solid wall; there can be nothing related to the church anywhere close to the state. However, that's not quite right. The correct interpretation is that there shouldn't be a state-sponsored church. In your case, as long as the school isn't sponsoring or advocating your club's message, it's ok. You can speak freely into the public square; that's the whole point of the 1st Amendment.

Can CSP help us get legal situations *resolved* at our school?

You are the leaders of your club, and CSP has no legal authority on your campus. Our job is to coach and encourage you to stand up for your own legal rights. And we can help you get ready to contact the Pacific Justice Institute to seek legal counsel if needed. If you're not sure how to work through these steps, feel free to call your Campus Mentor for encouragement and advice.

For your convenience, we have also included a letter from the Pacific Justice Institute in this Outreach Guide that you can hand to your administration or advisor. This letter covers a lot of the same content that is in the PJI Booklets that CSP can provide you with, but because it is addressed to your school's administration, it is a little more direct than the informational booklet is. We hope it will be useful to you!

See page 295 for more information.

Conclusion

As you can see, every situation of conflict or opposition with your administration will be unique. So do your homework: know the difference between the 1st Amendment and the Equal Access Act; know what you're allowed to do and why. And don't be surprised; instead, trust God in opposition just like in everything else. Respectfully fight for justice, not only for you but for students and leaders for years to come.

"CONSIDER IT PURE JOY, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE TRIALS OF MANY KINDS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE"

(JAMES 1:2-3).