



# Vandalism: How to Prevent It and What to Do if It Happens

## Practical Tips

“Won’t someone vandalize our Little Library?” you ask.

The answer is...maybe, but probably not. With thousands of Libraries around the world, here is what we have learned.

In the beginning, we were testing the limits. Millions of people were exposed to Little Libraries. The total number of Little Libraries damaged per year? Lower than .01%. But you can lower the odds even more.

### How to Prevent It

Who would want to damage such a fine (if small) institution as a Little Library? Well, the same kind of person who might set off firecrackers in mail boxes, turn over gravestones or show off to his friends. Thrill seekers. Boys in groups, for example. Drunk people.

What might keep them from doing that? Think like a mischief maker. The more he believes that he might be caught, the less likely he is to do the damage.

Try answering these questions when you plan where your Library will be:

**Will someone see me?** Crime prevention experts have been right for years. Good lighting helps. If the Library is in your front yard, keep the light on or have it near a street light. Put it where passing traffic can see it.

**Will it be easy to break or take?** If it has glass in it, yes. Plexiglas can be easily broken, too, but you can replace it. If it has artwork or hardware that can be removed, you are tempting fate. Can someone just grab a piece of the Library and bust it off? Anything that sticks out can be awfully tempting to someone under the influence of, well, evil thoughts and substances. Or rushes of youthful energy.

### Does anybody really care?

If everyone thinks nobody cares and no one is watching, someone will be more tempted to do

damage. If the Library is surrounded by weeds and trash, or is not well maintained, it is more likely to be damaged. If it is in the front yard of a beloved, friendly neighbor, it is more likely to be safe.

## Make it Personal

Let anyone near the Library know that it has a steward with a name who cares about it. It's even better if that steward has a picture on the Library and seems like a nice person. Children and smiling faces of all kinds work well.

Get as many people as possible to know they are a part of the success of the Little Free Library. It is a gift to all; not private property.

Friends, family and neighbors who know each other ("us") will cherish and protect the Library more than strangers will. Tagging and other forms of vandalism show up on "other people's" property. So anything that implies that this Library belongs to all of us, especially people whose names or faces are associated with the Library, can reinforce the idea that damaging the Library hurts someone.

Worried about "bad kids"? Gangs, real or imagined? Why not invite them into the circle of Little Library protectors? Tell them about it. Give them books. Ask them to be part of the **GIFT**—the Give It Forward Team. It can make them feel important.

Leave a handwritten note or a sign that says something like "Thank you for protecting and loving our Library!" Such a message can show that people do care; that watching out for the Library is the neighborhood norm.

## What Should You Do if Your Library is Vandalized?

**Repair it as soon as possible.** Remind yourself to believe in the goodness of the vast majority of people. But don't challenge those who did the damage to do it again by threatening or confronting them. If you do, everybody loses.

The best solution is not a video camera, warning signs or promoting a fear of punishment. Any or all of the ideas above are probably more effective than yelling at or fighting with roaming bands of "you knows." (Fill in the blank).

Let it be known in a positive way that a precious neighborhood resource has been damaged and comfort is needed. If you think it would help, move the Library to a less risky location.

## What Else Can You do?

- Ask people in the Little Free Library Facebook group for advice.
- Try the warm embrace of love and friendship. Forgiveness. If all else fails, the serenity prayer. Don't be defeated by meanness or others' needs to be noticed.
- Rebuild or replace the Library. Be prepared to build it yet one more time if necessary.

For just about every story of damage to Little Free Libraries we've heard others that inspire us. The wounded Libraries were mysteriously repaired or replaced, or we have found donors to rebuild them. And in one case, the perpetrator wasn't kids or gangs. It was mother nature herself! The lightning that struck a Little Free Library covered with metal keys affirmed Ben Franklin's electrical experiments hundreds of years ago.

The Library's theme: *books are a key to knowledge.*

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