Idea 17

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

When dealing with students, sometimes the way you communicate is just as important as the message you are sending. In particular, students who are oppositional-defiant or just plain stubborn often have difficulties responding to teacher requests or accepting "no" for an answer. Here are some quick tips for gaining cooperation without arguing with students.

Here are a few examples.

❶ **Use the phrase, "Yes, if . . ."** When students make frequent requests to do or get things, you don't always have to say no. Sometimes the phrase, "Yes, if . . ." will accomplish the same thing as the word "no" but without setting up an argument. This also allows you to be clear about your expectations.

❷ **Follow Grandma's Rule: "First, do this; then you can do that."** This rule has been around for years but it is still very effective when used with many students. When students beg, whine, wheedle, and protest to get their own way, they may escalate teachers' reactions. However, if you plan ahead, stay calm, and use this phrase, you can often encourage cooperation and compliance without a fight.

❸ **Fall back on the "Broken Record" technique.** When students are argumentative and reluctant to give up their opinions or desires, sometimes the best approach is just to keep on repeating your own request. Don't explain, argue, discuss, or accept excuses. Just repeat your request.

❹ **Build momentum by asking the "easy stuff" first.** One way to get oppositional students to cooperate and comply with requests is to build a sequence or chain of positive behaviors. You can do this by making simple requests first. Ask the student to do things he or she ordinarily would do anyway (e.g., have a seat, relax, get out your book). Then at the end of the sequence, add the more challenging request (e.g., Please answer the first question.).

❺ **Use the phrase, "Instead of _____, do _____."** To redirect students, tell them what to do instead of what they are doing.

> ☞ **Tip:**
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> These ideas are also useful for parents, so don't hesitate to share them with your students' families.