

WORDS TO LIVE BY

If it ain't written, it ain't so. Use a communication notebook whenever possible--it will save you lots of time and aggravation in the end. This notebook serves a couple of important functions: 1) it reduces anxiety for the individual who is obsessive in her thinking when she sees that you have recorded her concern and 2) it serves as "the final arbitrator" when the individual tells you that "so-and-so said she could..." If everyone is on top of things, you will be able to verify the statement (or not) by referring to the notebook. If nothing is written regarding the issue, then you can only respond with, "I'm sorry, but there is nothing about that in the notebook, so I'm afraid that unless I can contact so-and-so, you'll have to abide by my decision". (If so and so forgot to write in the notebook and the individual was correct, then so-and-so owes an apology.) The individual will learn very quickly to remind you and/or any other teacher/staff or family member to write things in the "special notebook" if it's something they *really* want others to know (e.g., "My mother is picking me up early from school today.").

Did you discuss that with _____ (lead teacher/primary counselor/identified decision-maker on that issue)? The individual will make every effort to obtain the desired response, so it is important to identify who's in charge of what decisions and refer the individual back to that person.

When/Where/How did you get that candy bar?--Not--Did you steal/eat a candy bar? [Remember--you know what happened, so why set the person up to lie? And if you happen to be wrong, then the person is entitled to a sincere apology.]

I can't answer that question. You need to ask [the person appropriate to the issue]. I'll help you write down the question (in the special notebook, if appropriate) and remind you to ask it of the right person.

You have a choice: Try and preface everything possible with those words. It makes a world of difference to the individual. Helps them to save face if need be or simply feel that they have some control over the situation. Examples: "You have a choice...You can eat that cookie you took from Mary and have equivalent calories deducted from your evening meal or you can give me the cookie and have your full dinner tonight"... "You can work on spelling or reading"... "You can take your shower now or in 10 minutes"... "You can have one packet of oyster cookies or 4 saltines." Let the person know that you'll be back in a few minutes for their decision and literally move away from him/her so they have time to think about it. This makes the decision their idea, not yours. (Controlled choices about food are really helpful in teaching the individual about their food plan and food exchanges.) Don't spend time trying to engage the person in a rational discussion on the issue, as it will only escalate into an argument at which point you have lost the battle. Simply identify the problem—present the options (if any)—provide the individual with a moment to decide and follow through on whatever action is warranted. **For food related situations: Never-ever attempt to forcibly take food away from the individual once they have it, unless you want to deal with a really major outburst and/or potential physical harm.**

You can go ahead and tell your mother about _____. I will also speak to your mom. *Or,* Why don't we speak with your mom together and explain what just happened.

Use open and inviting language rather than directives. Instead of "Get back to your seat and finish the worksheet now."--Try "What's the assignment for right now?" Instead of "Go put your walking shoes on as soon as you're finished with lunch"--Try "What's on your schedule after lunch"

Yes, you have rights. You also have responsibilities as a student in this school (or resident of this house) Would you like to go over them? (Have rules/responsibilities in writing.)

And don't forget to use the old reliable--I don't know the answer to that, so I'll have to get back to you tomorrow. [It buys you time. Just be sure to get back to the person as promised.]

Add your own standard expressions as they develop. It's not helpful to engage in a great deal of discussion over controversial issues. You will never reach "consensus". It is respectful, however, to direct people to the right place for answers, speak in understandable language, and to remind them of the agreed upon rules or guidelines.

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