



First Steps

#46

Who's Whining Now?

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Whining is defined as a verbal protest expressed in a sing-song manner in a pitch above that of the normal speaking voice. It's not so much the words a child uses as the sound effects of whining that wear parents down. A whine is the sound of a child who feels powerless and is pitching her request in higher and higher tones to get someone to pay attention to her. When children whine, they usually are not trying to be annoying—they are simply doing what it takes to get results. Parents must teach their children better ways of communicating their needs and wants in order to reduce or eliminate whining. The earlier children learn to express their needs without whining, the happier they and their parents will be!

What Do Parents Need to Understand About Whining?

- Whining is a way for a child to get his/her parent's attention.
- Whining for attention is one of the most irritating and tiring child behaviors.
- Whining is hard to listen to, so parents respond—often in a negative way.
- Whining is usually an expression of emotions rather than a demand for action.
- Whining is a learned behavior.
- Children often whine when they are tired, bored, hungry, or need to be comforted.
- Coaxing, bribing, or scolding your child not to whine may cause more unhappiness for you and your child.
- At any age, whining is just a symptom of how your child feels.



Source: Joslin, Karen Renshaw. Positive Parenting from A to Z.

At a time when both you and your child are calm, rested, and relaxed, and when your child is not whining, explain that she has a very pleasant voice that you like to hear. When she uses her higher-pitched whiny voice, it hurts your ears and you can't listen to what she has to say. Have your child practice using her pleasant voice to ask for something so she hears the voice you want her to use. Using "pretending games" is an excellent way for having some fun and practicing using a pleasant voice. Later, if your child whines, remind her to use the pleasant voice that you like to hear.

Why Do Children Whine?

1. Your child may not have the vocabulary to express what he is feeling or needing.
2. You may have to ask questions to understand the need.
3. Your child may not feel well. Tummy aches, sore throats or earaches might be a cause for whining.
4. Your child may just want you to listen, and whining is a guaranteed way to do that!
5. Your child may whine if he feels a task is too hard.
6. Your child may whine because she is bored. Help her think of fun things to do.
7. Your child may whine because he is impatient—this is a perfect time to help him learn to wait and to take turns.
8. Your child may whine if she is not getting enough love and quality time with you.
9. Your child may whine if he is tired or hungry. Provide frequent nutritious snacks and naps.

(Source: Dr Martha Erickson, "Growing Concerns". Univ. of Minnesota's Children, Youth and Family Consortium.)

What Can Parents Say and Do to Help Their Children Stop Whining?

- Do not get angry. Anger only upsets you and your child.
- Respond to your child's feelings. Stop what you are doing and pay special attention to your child. Say, "Let's just be here together for a while."
- Never label or call your child names (like "whiner").
- Try to identify with your child's feelings. Gently say something like: "Mary, I know you're hungry. I will slice you a banana as soon as you ask in a pleasant voice."
- Take the time to listen before your child begins to use his whiny voice.
- Anticipate and prevent situations when your child is likely to get whiny—that is at the end of a long day, in unfamiliar surroundings, when she is tired or doesn't feel well, or when she hasn't had enough personal time with you.
- Don't whine back at your child, imitating her in an exaggerated way. This will only serve to degrade her, not stop the whining.
- Remind your child to use his pleasant voice that you like to hear.
- Give your child more attention—stop what you're doing and give her your undivided attention for a few minutes.
- Understand that all children— regardless of age—have times when they may whine. Children need to learn to say specifically what they are upset about or what they feel they need in a pleasant speaking voice.
- If you do not respond to whining, your child will learn that whining doesn't work.



For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.