



HOW TO HANDLE WHINING

Young children face many disappointments each day. From our perspective, it seems like they should be delighted with their life. They get to play all the time, they don't have to pay bills or worry about what their next meal will be. From a child's perspective they are living in a world in which adults make most of the decisions. Adults decide what is for dinner, when you go to the doctor, when you have to brush your teeth and go to sleep, when you get to go to the park, when you get to watch TV. There are many frustrations associated with being little.

Further, young children have a hard time seeing beyond the immediate moment. So when you say your child can't have a cookie before dinner, frustration is all your child can see. Your child is just approaching the stage when he or she can say to him-

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self, "Oh, that's all right, because I know it won't be long before dinner is over and I'll get a cookie, then."

With all this frustration, kids are likely to cry, complain,

whine, moan, scream and beg. While it is important that they are allowed to express their feelings, it is also a time that we can help them learn appropriate ways to do so. It is helpful for parents to understand the breadth of their control.

Parents get to decide when their son or daughter gets a cookie, what their bedtime should be, etc., but they don't get to decide how he or she is going to feel about it. It is important that you and your child understand that his or her feelings are their own. You can help him or her learn what they are called. You can help him or her understand what makes them come on and what makes them feel better. While you continue to model and instruct him or her in appropriate ways to express their feelings, you can't control whether or not your child has them.

Here are some ideas about what children are learning about feelings at this age and some ways of helping them:



Feelings are an important part of children's self concept. Children in the first five years are developing a sense of who they are. They are discovering that they have feelings. It is important that they understand that all the feelings they have are healthy. The significant adults in their lives can help them learn this by the way they respond to children's feelings. Even when children's behavior is unacceptable, you can let them know that their feeling is valid. "It sounds like you are feeling frustrated. I don't like whining. Can you find another way to tell me how you are feeling?"

Children don't fully understand their feelings. Children are born with the ability to experience feelings, but they have to learn the names for them, what causes them, how long they last, how people respond to them and appropriate ways to express them. As we respond to children's feelings they begin to get some of this information.

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Whining is particularly hard for adults to listen

to. Universally, whining is one of the most difficult expressions for parents to endure. It is probably a combination of the "pitch" of the whine and the fact that there is a kind of a hook on the end of the whine that says, "You have to fix this for me." If adults can understand that kids may not yet have another way to express their feeling, and that they don't have to "do something" about it, parents may be better able

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to just let the whining run its course.

It takes two to make begging work. The hardest part about begging is being clear that you aren't going to change your mind. If you are clear that you aren't going to, you can tell your son or daughter, "This isn't a decision I am going to negotiate. I

know you are disappointed about it and you can ask as long as you need to, but I'm not going to change my mind, no matter how long you ask or beg." If the whining or begging is really getting to you, you can ask your son or daughter to go into the other room for awhile if your child still needs to whine. After a

few minutes, you can check on them.

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Whining seems to be a developmental step. Most kids whine at some time

or another. There are several aspects to whining. It seems that whining expresses an emotion that few other expressions do. It is a different feeling from crying or talking. Sometimes, it seems kids whine when they know already that the thing they are asking for is going to be denied (but they have to ask anyway).

Kids whine because they don't know what else to do with their disappointment. When they ask for a remote control car and you say no, they still want it. They don't know what to do with their feeling of still wanting something after you say "no." Most times, kids whine when they are overtired or hungry. The whining is an expression that they desperately need something (food or rest), but they are usually asking for something else. Sometimes kids whine because parents can ignore almost any other request, but whining grates on their nerves enough to get a response.

Respond to whining in a way that meets both your needs and your child's. It is important that you give your child information about how people respond to whining and begging and that you help him or her learn socially acceptable ways to express their feelings. It is equally important that your son or daughter knows that you care about them and what they are feeling. "I know you are disappointed about not getting that new remote control car, but when you use that whiny voice, it is really

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hard for me to listen to you." "It sounds like you are still wanting that car, but begging for it doesn't change my mind, it just makes it hard for me to be with you. You could say, 'Dad, I'm sooooo disappointed about that car. I really wanted it'.

It may take some time. Kids don't learn anything in an instant. They have to practice and hear things repeated several times in many different contexts. Often they have to grow to a new developmental stage before they are ready to change. Rather than "putting an end to this once and for all," you will begin a journey in which your son or daughter starts to learn some alternative ways to express their feelings and communicate with those around him or her. Even when he begins using other expressions, he may slip back and need some gentle reminding.

Excerpted from Whining: When will it stop? by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser

