

How to Help your Child stop Whining

There are few behaviors that are more frustrating to parents than whining. Yet for children, whining can be a quick and easy way to get a parent's full attention. Children whine when they feel overwhelmed by an emotion or desire and do not have the vocabulary to express their feelings.

They also might whine when they do not have the skills to complete a task or because they feel tired, hungry, powerless, or lonely. Simply put, children whine to ask for help.

You can help your child figure out WHY he is whining and help him to find a better way to communicate.

Your child will continue to whine until you teach him a new skill. When you give into his whine for candy at the check-out counter, you are teaching him that his whining behavior is working, and he should use it again. When you take away your son's favorite toy because he won't stop whining, you increase his feelings of insecurity and actually also increase the likelihood that he will whine more often. Instead, you can teach him to use his words to tell you about his feelings and, together, you can come up with a way to solve his problem.

Try this at home:

If your child often whines when she is tired, consider running errands before or after her nap time, when she is rested. Setting the time and activity up for success.

If your child often whines when she is hungry or bored, hope for the best but be prepared for the worst. Carry a small snack, pack a coloring book and crayons, or have a special activity ready to go that is only for this type of occasion.

Teach your child that his needs get met when he uses his words. If he is whining for milk, tell him, "You can say, daddy, milk please." When he uses those words, follow up by saying, "Of course I will get your milk! Thank you for using your words!" If your child continues to whine remind them that you cannot hear them when they are using a "whiney voice" and that you would be happy to help them if they use their words.

In a calm and happy moment, play with whining. Make a stop sign with "red, stop" on one side and "green, go" on the other. He can pretend to be the dad and you can pretend to be the child. Ask him for a toy using a variety of voices—whining, yelling, talking, and whispering and after each request ask him, "Stop or go?" He too can practice using each kind of voice and when he whines, you can say, "No Way!" When he asks for the toy in a talking voice you can say excitedly, "Yes, yes! Here's the toy and you get a kiss too!"

Whining is a common way for your child to tell you that she needs help. Until she learns a new way to get your attention, she will likely continue to whine. You can teach and show your child how to use her words to clearly express her needs. Children who are confident talking about their emotions and feel heard by their parents are less likely to whine.

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, ChallengingBehavior.org.

