

HOW TO GET CHILDREN TO STOP WHINING!

By Janet Gonzalez-Mena

“I hate whining,” a mother said to me. “There’s something about a complaining tone that grates on my ears; I can take crying and screaming much better than whining.” Before I answered her, I noted to myself that her own tone was a complaining one. It seems we sometimes hate most in others that

very behavior that we tend to exhibit ourselves.

Over the years I’ve watched parents deal with whining. “Go sit in the whining chair!” was one mother’s solution when her “no’s” resulted in a whining response. I should have done a longitudinal study to discover if it worked or not. My impression is that it didn’t because she was forever saying it.

My cousin was sent to her room---banished. My aunt’s theory was if her daughter was going to be whiny, she didn’t want to be around her. My cousin felt her banishment went way beyond whining and extended to any feeling her mother couldn’t tolerate. She carried a long-time resentment about only being allowed around others when she was in a pleasant mood. She felt her mother was trying to teach her to put on a smiling face no matter how she felt.

One mother I once knew used a distraction technique for whining. Her son would start and she’d play the clown. She put on such a good show that she managed to get him to forget whatever it was he was begging for. I wonder if he grew up and felt his mother was trying to get him to repress his feelings.

And then there are the parents who just give in. That’s a sure way to increase whining; say no to buying a toy until you can’t stand the fuss, then buy it so the child will stop. It works---until the next time you say no. If you want to

teach children not to whine, buy them a toy out of the blue when they don’t ask. Or buy them a toy when they first ask, but never when they plead, beg, fuss or whine.

Sometimes children whine because there are too many yes’s in their lives---sometimes because there are too many no’s. What you do about the whining depends on what is behind it. If the child has never learned to accept a no answer, it’s probably a good time to start teaching him or her. Start by explaining what you are doing and why, then don’t give in to whining!

On the other hand if every request or demand the child makes is always turned down, he or she may feel powerless and use whining to try to gain control. Be reasonable. Think about whether you can grant the request instead of automatically saying no. But if you decide to grant it, do it right away, not after the whining starts.

What some children need is not more toys but more attention. When they don’t get it, they whine. This is an easy one---give them attention---before the whining starts, not after. It may seem that giving children the attention they need will just make them hungry for ever increasing amounts. But attention, like food, satisfies when given in appropriate amounts. Withholding it increases the craving. Keeping food from a starving person doesn’t make any sense---neither does keeping attention from children who need it. Once the hunger goes away they stop whining.

Whining may be a temporary response to a difficult situation as a child is faced with a challenge she can’t manage. Maybe she is sick, tired, or hungry, or just out of sorts and nothing that she tries will work. Some cuddles and snuggles may be the answer to whining in this instance.

Or maybe the child is going through a stage where his hands and feet don’t work the way he wants and life is continually frustrating. In that case the whining may last until development moves him through the growth period.

Your understanding and accepting the child's feelings can help soothe them.

Like most parenting issues, there's no one simple solution to whining. If whining is a problem for you, a place to start changing things is with self reflection. Ask yourself, "Am I modeling the very behavior I'm trying to change in my child?" If your answer is yes, you might want to work on your own behavior before you go to work on your child's.

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