

FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health

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STOP WHINING!



THE ISSUE

“I don’t want to go to bed/take a nap.” “I don’t like chicken noodle soup. I want a cookie.” “Sally’s bugging me. Tell her to stop.” Statements like these from a child are common and totally normal, but they can be extremely

annoying if they are repeated over and over in a whiny voice. There’s just something about that whiny voice that drives parents (and teachers) to distraction; who hasn’t at some point spoken sharply to a child, “Stop whining!”?

WHY CHILDREN WHINE

- To communicate how powerless they feel and that their needs are not being met
- To get attention
- Because they’re bored, tired, stressed or fearful
- Because they feel insecure
- Because it often actually works (parents give in just to stop that whiny voice!)

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD STOP WHINING

- Spend individual time with your child every day and give your total attention. Don’t make him feel it’s necessary to whine to get your attention.

- Respond immediately when your child talks to you.
- Don’t reward whining (no matter how tempting it is to give in just to stop the whining!)
- Demonstrate the tone of voice you would like your child to use to talk to you and remind her that you’ll only respond when she talks without whining and it makes you happy when she doesn’t whine to get what she wants.
- Reinforce appropriate talk—when your child tries to get your attention without whining, praise him.
- Create a “whining area” and “whine-free” zones. In the whining area, such as his bedroom, the child can whine if he wants to without bothering you. For the whine-free zones (e.g., living/family room, kitchen), put up signs as reminders.
- Since whining may mean that the child needs to let go of bad feelings, try to take time to listen and give the child an opportunity to release those feelings without continuing to whine.

SOURCES:

- “Dealing with Whining,” in *Pathways to Competence: Encouraging Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children*, by Sarah Landy (Brookes Publishing, 2009), pp. 479-480
- “Dealing with Whining: The Do’s and Don’ts,” www.pregnancy.org/article/dealing-whining-dos-and-donts
- “Dealing with Whining,” <http://library.adoption.com/articles/dealing-with-whining.html>



Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee

Ensuring that coordinated and effective mental health services are available for all young children across the commonwealth

FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health factsheets: www.parecovery.org
Pyramid Model graphic courtesy of the Center for the Emotional and Social Foundations of Early Learning