

Positive Parenting of Toddlers

Whining

Whining is common in young children and can be very frustrating for parents. Coping with whining is even more difficult if it is your child's usual way of talking. Children who whine a lot need help to learn more appropriate ways of speaking. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you manage whining and teach your child how you would like them to talk to others.

What Is Whining?

Whining is a drawn out, complaining way of speaking, often in an irritating tone of voice. This is an unacceptable way of making requests or comments.

Why Do Children Whine?

Whining may be a way for children to communicate discomfort, such as when they are hungry, bored, tired, wet, unhappy or unwell. Younger toddlers may whine when they don't have the words to say what they want. They whine less as they learn the names of things they want, how to speak in a pleasant tone of voice and how to say *Please*, *Thank you* and *May I have*. Older toddlers who whine a lot may do so for the following reasons:

- *To get attention.* Your child may ask nicely at first, but if nobody takes any notice your child may then whine to be noticed.
- *To get their own way.* If whining works it will continue. Children learn that there is a chance they will get what they want if they keep whining. When you give in to whining you accidentally reward your child. The whining may stop at the time, but it is likely to happen next time your child wants something.
- *To complain about not getting their own way.* This sort of whining can occur when you say *No* or ask your child to do something they do not want to do, or when they become frustrated when things do not go the way they expected.



How To Manage Whining

Tell Your Child What To Do

When your child approaches you and whines for something, stop what you are doing and bend down to their level. Tell your child to stop whining and to speak nicely—*Jenny do not whine for a biscuit. Ask nicely.*

Show Your Child How To Ask Nicely

At first, give your child an example of what you would like them to say—*Jenny, say: Mummy, can I have a biscuit please?* Use a pleasant voice and simple words that your child can say. In future, when your child has learnt how to ask nicely, you can remind them to use the words by saying *Pardon?*

Praise Your Child for Asking Nicely

Praise your child if they follow your example of asking nicely or if they ask nicely without being reminded—*That was nice asking. Well done.*

Decide Whether the Request Is Reasonable

When your child uses a pleasant voice you can respond to their request. Do not say *Yes* or *No* until they have asked nicely. Sometimes you will need to say *No* even if your child has asked nicely. Learning to accept *No* is an important part of growing up. Refuse the request in a calm voice and give your reason—*That was nice asking Jenny, but dinner is soon so you cannot have a biscuit.* Suggest something else your child can do instead—*You could go and finish your game or watch TV until dinner is ready.*

Give One Reminder

If your child keeps whining and does not ask nicely when you tell them how to ask, remind them once—*Say: can I have a biscuit please Mummy?*

Back Up Your Request with a Logical Consequence

If your child still does not ask nicely, provide a logical consequence. The most appropriate consequence is that your child does not get what they asked for—*You haven't asked nicely. The biscuits go away for ten minutes. Try again then.*

Completely Ignore Further Whining

If your child whines in response to being denied what they want, turn away and pay no attention until your child stops whining. Do not look at or speak to your child. You may need to walk away. When you first try this, be prepared for the whining to get worse before it gets better. If you ignore the whining for a while and then give in, you will teach your child that they need to whine louder and longer to get what they want. Your child must learn that they will not get what they want when they whine. If you have said *No* stick to it. Being consistent will teach your child you mean no when you say *No*.

Praise Your Child

As soon as your child is quiet, talks with a pleasant voice, or plays nicely, praise them—*Thanks for using your nice voice* or *You're being very quiet, that's great.*

Points To Remember

At first, your child's behaviour may get worse when you change your response to whining. Some children run after their parents and hit, kick or pinch, others may throw themselves on the floor in a tantrum. See the tip sheets *Hurting Others* and *Tantrums* in this series for more information on how to manage these problem behaviours.

Key Steps

- Praise your child for speaking nicely.
- If your child whines for something, remind your child to speak nicely.
- Decide if your child's request is reasonable and stick to your decision.
- Use logical consequences for continued whining.
- Ignore whining in response to being told *No*.
- Be consistent—once you have started ignoring, continue until the whining stops.

See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.



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