



What To Do About Whining

Why do children whine?

Whining is very common in toddlers and preschoolers. It is a normal part of growing up. Young children do not yet have the words or the skills to handle big feelings on their own. It happens the most when they are tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or frustrated. It does not mean your child is spoiled or difficult. It means they need your support.

What is behind the whine?

Before you respond, take a moment to think about what your child might need. Are they hungry or tired? Did they have a hard day? Have there been a lot of changes lately? Whining is a sign that your child is having trouble coping. They may need connection and comfort.

What you can do

Stay calm before you respond. Whining can be hard to listen to. Taking a deep breath first will help you react with patience instead of frustration. Your calm response makes it easier for your child to calm down, too.

Listen to what they are saying, not how they are saying it. Try to understand what your child needs. Say, "I hear you telling me you are really hungry. Let's find you a snack." Responding to the need behind the whine is more helpful than focusing on the whine itself.

Praise any request that is calm. Make sure your child knows how much you like hearing their calm, big-kid voice. You can say something like, "Thank you for asking so nicely."



Get closer and offer comfort. Sometimes a hug or a snuggle is all your child needs. Moving closer to your child can help them feel safe and calm down quickly.

Over time, teach your child what to do instead of whining. A very young child may need cues like, "I can listen better when you whisper. Can you tell me what you need softly in my ear?" or, "Can I sit with you, and you can tell me why you're mad/crying/yelling?"

You can show older children what a calm voice sounds like and ask them to try it. Say, "I want to help you. Please tell me how you are feeling in a different way. I will listen." You do not have to respond to a request made in a whiny voice. Let your child know that you are happy to help when they ask in a calm voice. When they do use a calm voice, stop what you are doing and pay attention. This teaches them that a calm voice works better than a whine.

Less is more

Try not to give the whining itself too much attention. Focusing *only* on the whine can actually make it worse. And when your child does ask for something calmly, make sure to notice it and tell them how great it sounds.

Most children gradually grow out of whining. But it takes time. This stage can take a lot of patience from parents. But modeling calm, kind language is a great way to help your child learn a different way of asking!

Have more questions?

Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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