

# Parenting strategies can help you bottle the whine

Nothing can wear you down as quickly as a whining child. You may think you are patient, kind-hearted, understanding and virtuous beyond vocabulary. Five minutes with a whining child can make all those golden qualities evaporate. And let us not forget whiny adults. Whining isn't just a youngster's activity.

Whining works. Which is why it is used. Most of us would rather give in than listen to wh-i-i-i-i-ning. What does whining really communicate?

For starters, whiners try to get our attention. Whiners try to get their way. Whining signals that a person is feeling hurt, or is feeling ignored and inadequate. These four motivations boil down to needing power and attention. The whiner wants, or even needs, power or attention, or both.

Behavior, in children and adults, is need-driven. These needs may be physical or emotional. If a person is tired, hungry, cold and wet, whining may well be a way of communicating that food, a warm bath, and a bed are needed. The whiner wants someone to pay attention to immediate physical needs, needs that he feels powerless to obtain on his own.

A whiner may be feeling lonely, bored, angry, sad, and feeling powerless to change the situation. The whiner may also want something that may not be about the object desired but relate to unmet needs. For example, whining

about wanting a doll may be about trying to communicate a need for more attention from mom or dad, or perhaps a need to take a doll and snuggle up for a nap. Whining for a cookie may signal hunger, tiredness, or a need for attention or to feel in control. Discovering the whiner's needs can take some detective work.

It is up to us as the adults in charge to try to interpret the whining and connect it to a need. When we can find the need and meet it, then the whining stops, and the whiners learns to ask for what they need in an appropriate manner.

It's important not to give in to the whine, or you create reinforcement that whining works as an effective communication tool. When the whining starts, take a deep breathe, and ask the

whiner to please tell you what they need or want.

If a child's needs are physical, take care to get the child food, water, rest, and clothing, whatever the case may be. Use your actions, not words, to meet the child's physical needs.

When a child's needs are emotional, sometimes a few words can turn the situation around. Perhaps your child is upset about having to go to bed. "I wa-a-n-n-n-a sta-a-a-ay u-u-u-up."

Say what you see: I see you are upset right now.

Ask the need question: What do you really need right now?

Wait for the answer or guess at the answer: Do you need a hug right now?



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Kids Talk™

Take action.

Whining can signal many different needs or wants that often stem from a need for attention or power. These behaviors need interpretation. Whining is a need-driven behavior and needs can be physical or emotional. For physical needs, ask for appropriate requests—not whining—and use your actions, not words, to fill the physical need. For emotional needs, use words to name the experience: I see that you are upset right now. What do you really need to feel better? Then take action to fulfill needs.

Understanding our children makes whining an unnecessary and short-lived communication tool. You, too, can learn to bottle the whine.

*Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has over 30 years experience working with children and holds teaching credentials from the Association Montessori Internationale.*

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