

Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

Vol. 8 No. 6 • February 2009

Winning over the Whines

Don't we all love the sound of the whining child? That melodious call wafting over the kitchen, endlessly repeating until the request is met or nap time begins. Somehow I don't think that 30 years from now, when you have gathered all your children together for a family reunion, you will be fondly reminiscing about whines.

You might, however, be secretly smug upon hearing a repeat of the same whines from your grandchildren.

Whining is annoying and frustrating and irritating and contagious and habit-forming and tiresome and now I am starting to whine about whining.

Children whine for many different reasons, but the basic skill that can prevent whining is called *self-regulation*. Self-regulation is a skill that develops over a lifetime. Self-regulation has to do with paying attention, keeping your hands to yourself, planning ahead, and many other skills, but it is also about learning how to cope and developing a confidence that problems can be solved.

Parents can help children develop self-regulation skills and thereby end whining by taking simple steps in the right direction. First, define the whine, next prevent the whine, and finally, replace the whine. OK, that is the battle plan. Let us com-

mence.

Define the whine

In spite of the fact that whining is painfully noticeable to parents and other adults, children are not necessarily aware that they are whining. They simply default to a previously successful method to get what they want or need.

In other words, they have developed a habit. In order to stop whining, you need to shine a bright light on it at the point it happens. It is fine to have a family discussion about whining and to make an agreement that it will stop. However, your children will not be aware that you mean it. When children whine, they are focused

on what they want, not on how they are attempting to get it.

You need to consistently stop whining when it happens and point it out then. For young children, it works well to request that they repeat themselves in a normal

voice. For older children, who roll their eyes when they have the obvious pointed out to them, ask them to submit their request in writing. If you have several whiners in the family, it can work well to keep a whine jar that gets a quarter from the child when whining happens. Personally, I think the proceeds from this jar should go toward soothing bath products for Mom, but you

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may want to redistribute this wealth (in equal portions) to the children when the whining has stopped after a set length of time.

Prevent the whine

Children whine for attention and out of frustration. They are also more likely to whine when they are tired. Toddler whining should be a ticket for a ride to the nap room, usually protested by vigorous eye-rubbing and the phrase "But I not tired, Mommy!"

But, children past the napping stage

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need adequate amounts of sleep too. Persistent whining, especially when it happens around the same time every day, may indicate that your child is not getting enough rest. Prevent whining by making an adjustment in the bedtime schedule. Pay attention, also, to your child's diet and the amount of outdoor play time. Too much sugar can affect your child's mood and children need movement to keep from feeling tired and listless.

Sometimes attention-getting whines can be prevented too. If you know a visitor is coming, or you want to make a phone call, give your child a heads-up. Set the boundaries for attention and let them know when you will be able to take care of their needs. For many children, knowing that there is a time limit for how long Mom or Dad will be occupied helps to reassure them that they will again be the center of attention.

Frustration is the third major reason for whining and this is a tough nut to crack. Each child has his or her own temperament and this decides to a great degree how he or she handles stress. While it is not likely that you will be able to teach your child how to be more "laid-back," all children can and should learn how to cope with frustration and stress.

The first step is to teach them what not to do. Whining is a natural reaction to frustration and stress, but we need to point out to children that whining does not improve the situation. It actually makes the situation worse because whining makes them feel bad and makes others less willing to help.

When your child is not frustrated, take time to talk about whining. Try role-playing or acting out "what if" situations such as what if daddy whined when he couldn't find his screwdriver, what if mommy whined when she had too much laundry. Acting this out, with over-the-top exaggeration, can help a child to see that these behaviors are not constructive.

Your own reactions to frustration and

stress give you and excellent opportunity to model for your child. Parents are sinners too, so when you slip up, point that out to your child and apologize. Let your child see that mistakes happen, yet they can be forgiven and that God will help us cope.

Replace the whine

The long term method for conquering the whines is to help your child develop self-regulation skills. As parents, we are the primary teachers for our children in the areas of verbal, problem solving, and coping skills. When a child has developed in these three areas, he or she no longer needs to whine.

Verbal skills: Replace your child's whining phrases with appropriate words and give her words for her feelings. Let your child know when he or she is feeling tired or jealous or frustrated. Identifying feelings and learning to use feeling words is important to emotional health.

Problem solving

skills: Children get frustrated when they cannot see a solution to their problem. Help your child to learn to calm down and assess the situation. Ask questions that help them to think through things

and brainstorm possible solutions. He will gradually learn how to do this on his own and when to seek help. This will go a long way to helping her to develop self-confidence.

Coping skills: Babies have favorite blankets and pacifiers to self-soothe, but we all need a way to calm down and cope with what life throws at us. Some children need to learn the difference between a tragedy and a frustration. They will benefit from parents telling them "I can see that you are frustrated (or angry, or jealous) but this is not a tragedy." Then they need to be told

how to deal with the situation. You can see how important the verbal and problem solving skills are to coping skills.

The faith factor is also very important. When we whine, we forget about the heart of gratitude with which God has blessed us. Our faith reminds us that God loves us, no matter what.

God loves us when we feel great and things are going our way and He loves us when we feel like the world is against us. Whining and complaining covers up the gratitude that

determines our attitude toward our life situation. Model gratitude for your children and look for opportunities to point out God's love for them.

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever.

Ps. 107:1

This verse can be found in many of the Psalms. It is more than a table prayer, it is a theme verse for a healthy, happy family.



God loves us no matter what . . . He loves us when we feel great and things are going our way, and when we feel like the world is against us.

For Discussion:

- ▶ Is there a time of day that represents the worst whine zone at your house?
- ▶ Are there particular situation that are more likely to produce whines?
- ▶ What are some examples of parent versions of whining?
- ▶ How did your parents handle whining?
- ▶ What works best for your child?

For Further Study:

For more tips on conquering whining:

- ▶ <http://parentcenter/babycenter.com>

For more information on self-regulation:

- ▶ www.pbs.org/wholechild/parents

"Parent Pages" is published by LCMS District and Congregational Services—School Ministry

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Vol. 8, No. 6 • February 2009