

## GROWING UP

### Eliminating Whining from a Child's Playbook

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

The warning sound came from the three year old boy that a battle was about to ensue. "Moooom, moooom, I waaant iiiiii!" came out of the little boy's mouth and sent shivers up his mother's back. "Oh no," she thought, "It is starting and he is going to just keep going and going until I give in." The mother quickly reached out towards the candy bar in the checkout aisle and gave it to the boy. All of a sudden, silence reigned as the little boy began eating the candy bar and his mother sighed in relief.

Whining is that irritating blend of talking and crying and is an experience that all parents go through to one degree or another. Despite the fact that whining is a normal part of a child growing up, it does not make it any more pleasant for parents when they are experiencing it.

Whining tends to start around three years of age as toddlers gain a better vocabulary but still have trouble expressing their emotions. Most toddlers will whine when they are tired, uncomfortable, cranky, hungry, or don't want to do something. Whining serves the purpose of drawing a parent's attention to the toddler so his needs can be met.

Unfortunately, parents can make whining occur more often by responding to the whining. In the case above, the mom gave the boy a candy bar which taught the child that if he wants something, whining is good way to get it. The mom is also being rewarded for giving the boy a candy bar as his whining stopped soon after. When these two reward systems combine, they result in the child whining more often and the parent giving in to her child's demands more quickly.

While this can work for both the parent and child, it also makes whining a habit for the child when he interacts with others. This will result in other children and adults having a negative reaction to the child as no one likes someone who whines to get what they want.

Fortunately there are steps that parents can take to minimize the amount of whining their children engage in. The first step is to make children aware of how their whining sounds. Parents can record their child when he whines. This is easily accomplished as most smartphones have recording capabilities. After recording a whining session, play it back for the child. Then talk to the child about better ways to communicate what he wants. It is important to model how this would sound such as, "Mom, I am getting hungry. Could I get a candy bar?" This way the child will know a better way to ask when he needs something.

The second step is to pay attention to the child when he is asking for something. When he does, make a big deal about how nicely he asked. This does not mean that a parent has to give in every time the child asks for something.

Finally, parents will need to have patience and continue to work with the child in expressing his needs in an appropriate manner as whining will not magically stop the first time parents use these

steps. When whining does occur, acknowledge the child in a calm voice and let him know that you can't understand what he wants when he is whining. Tell him that if he asks nicely, then you can respond to him.

With some patience and perseverance, a child's whining will eventually stop and parents can move on to address new concerns.

Biography:

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