



## Whiny Kids: What to do?

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By Laura Hilgers

What do you do when you hear in that telltale singsong voice: "It's not fair!" or "But Emily gets to!" The most important thing is never to give in to whining, unless you want to raise children who always whine when they want something or are unhappy with something. The best way to deal with a whiner is to say calmly and simply: "I cannot hear what you are saying when you whine. Try asking me the same question like this: 'Mommy, I want to go outside,' and then we'll discuss it." Whether you say yes or no is not as important as not responding to that whiny voice. Here are some quick do's and don'ts.

### **When You Hear: "It's not fair!"**

*DON'T say:* "Well, life's not fair."

*DO:* empathize with your child's situation: "I know it's really hard when your sister gets to go to a sleepover and you have to stay home." He'll be more likely to calm down if you acknowledge that he's upset, because he'll feel understood. You can also say: "Yes, I know it's not fair, but why don't we do something together that you like to do instead?"

### **When You Hear: "But whhhy?"**

*DON'T say:* "Because I said so!"

*DO:* Turn the question around. Ask, "Why do you think I'm saying no?" It works because your child has to stop whining long enough to think of an answer. If your child can't come up with anything, give hints. The trick is to get your child to think from your point of view, so she's more likely to understand the rules. Whenever her kids whine, one mom asks them, "I can't understand you when you talk like that. Are you speaking Russian again?" Her kids usually start laughing and then change their tone.

**When You Hear: "You can't make me!"**

*DON'T say:* "Oh, yes I can!"

*DO:* Turn your request into a game: "Let's see if you can put your clothes in the hamper in two minutes." Use a timer and let him run for it. Simply saying, "Oh, yes I can" sets the stage for a major power struggle. If this doesn't work, come up with a consequence. Calmly say, "You have 10 minutes to put away your toys or we won't go to the playground later" – and then stick to it. This makes it clear that you're the one in charge.

One parent had this comeback when her son refused to wear his seat belt. "I told him that if the police find out that he's not wearing his seat belt, they'd get very mad at me. Now he puts it on the minute he gets in the car."

**When You Hear: "Daddy would let me!"**

*DON'T say:* "Well, Daddy's not here."

*DO say:* "If you think Daddy would say yes, then Daddy and I need to talk because we want to agree on these things." But even if you can't get on the same page with your spouse – and sometimes you can't – kids still need to know that they have to obey whoever is in charge.

**When You Hear: "But Emily gets to!"**

*DON'T say:* "I don't care what Emily's parents let her do."

*DO:* Reinforce your rules. "Different families have different rules. In our family, we don't watch TV on weekdays." You can help keep the peace by having specific limits (and make them few and reasonable). Post your family's rules on the refrigerator, and talk about them when you're willing to discuss the rules and the reasons behind them in a calm way, not in a reaction to a whine.

**When You Hear "But I waaant it!"**

*DON'T say:* "You can't always get what you want."

*DO say:* "It does look like a fun toy. Should we add it to your birthday list or would you like to save your allowance money for it?" This helps kids learn to delay gratification plus gives them hope and empowers them.