

CONNECTING!

^ ^

Parents Leadership Institute's E-Mail Newsletter
Volume 2, Number 7 – October 1, 2002

^ ^

Parents Leadership Institute is a non-profit organization that fosters healthy parent-child relationships that will last a lifetime.

We give parents simple, concrete tools to build and rebuild a close relationship with their children, and to lead their families well. We promote parent-to-parent support founded on mutual respect, listening, and the desire of parents to love their children well.

^ ^

In this issue:

PLI Events Calendar

Parenting Tip: What's The Cure for Whining?

Success Story - My Daughter's Need for a Video Disappears.

News – * Mothering Magazine will carry an article on the PLI approach to Tantrums.

* PLI PlayMorning in November for Parents and Children.

* Volunteer sought for transcription of parent anecdotes.

* Buy our booklets, tapes, and videos online! Discount for bulk orders.

* Let us know how you use the articles on our web site.

* Got great photos?

Pass It On!

Subscribe/Unsubscribe

Donate To PLI

^ ^

A fresh PLI Events Calendar (San Francisco Bay Area) can be found at
<http://www.parentleaders.org/Classes.html>

Look for events in Alameda, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz Counties.

Our next calendar will be posted November 15th.

^ ^

Parenting Tip:

WHAT'S THE CURE FOR WHINING?

If we wanted to rank the things children commonly do from most to least endearing, we'd find whining somewhere near the bottom of the list! It's a behavior that every child tries at times. Some children fall into it and can't seem to climb out. It's an almost universal

parent irritant. By the time you decide to search for advice about handling whining, you've had more than your fill of it!

Giving your child what he whines for will occasionally change the situation for the better. More often, once whining has started, more "off track" behavior follows close behind. Your child whines for a turn with the tanker truck, and you arrange that for him. Then, he plays with it but won't give it up when it's the other child's turn, and whines or tantrums if you insist. Or you child whines for one more cookie. You say no, and he jumps up and down, upset, and runs off to his room after calling you a "bad Daddy."

Complying with your child's whining request usually won't change his emotional climate, which is cloudy, with a storm on the horizon. But sending him off to his room, or punishing him for whining, also doesn't improve his functioning. He might come back from punishment or isolation a quieter person, but he won't feel close to you. He will find ways to balk, to stir up difficulties with others, or to zone out with thumb-sucking or videos or eating.

Whining Is Communication

Like every other behavior children have, whining is important communication. We parents wish the message would come in some other form--any other form! But a whine is fresh news from your child, hot off the press. The headline is, "I CAN'T TELL THAT YOU CARE ABOUT ME! I DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIX IT!"

Everyday things like getting dressed when they want to stay in their pajamas, having to do homework instead of play with the cat, and having to say goodbye and go to school or day care can bring up jumbo-sized feelings of powerlessness for children. They want to be in charge of their lives. And ordinary things you do like feeding little sister, cooking dinner, or talking to a friend on the phone can eat away at a child's sense that he's connected and cared about. For young children in a big world, feeling disconnected is a gnawing emergency. Out comes the signal for help, "I wannaaaa cooookkkiiiiiee...", along with a miserable expression and a body that's lost its strength.

Testing the Situation

It's not your job as a loving parent to sidestep the things that need to be done to keep the family organized, fed, and connected to the rest of the world, just because your child complains. Your child does indeed need your attention, but it's usually a mistake to cater to his whining requests one after the other. If providing the thing he asks for seems to make sense to you, go ahead and try it once. But if more whining for something else follows, you can be sure that the real issue is his emotional "weather," not hunger for cookies or the lack of a red soccer shirt.

A Whining Child Has Real Needs

Although your whining child isn't satisfied by the help you give, he DOES have a real need. He needs YOU. Not just the things you do. He needs to feel connected to you. Only a sense of connection can mend that awful out-of-sorts feeling he has. Children are built to feel close to the people they're with--close to their parents, their caregivers, their grandmas and cousins and friends. When they can feel close and cherished, they behave with confidence and originality. They do things a bit differently every day, experimenting often as they play, learn, and grow in understanding. When they don't feel close to anyone, their behavior goes haywire immediately. And sometimes, whining results.

Your Child's Feelings May Not Reflect the Reality of the Situation

Comings and goings, moving from one activity to another, or seeing you preoccupied with other things are all corrosive to a child's sense that all is sweet between you and him. You may actually be close and available, but sometimes even when we're most available, children can't feel our love or our caring, because the feeling of being alone has already taken over. Human feelings can turn murky and turbulent even when the actual situation holds lots of promise. This mismatch of feelings and reality happens often with both children and parents!

For instance, it often happens that toward the end of a sweet, close playtime during which you've done the things your child loves to do with you, he'll suddenly turn whiny and dissatisfied. You've done your utmost to make things good, and in the end, you have a weakly unhappy child, whining, "You never do anything I want!" It's enough to make a parent feel, "I'm never going to put myself out for you again, if this is the way you behave!"

The whining happens because, at the prospect of the end of a time your child loved with all his heart, stale old feelings of helplessness ("I can't get Daddy to stay and play with me!") or abandonment ("Why does Mommy always have to make the dinner--she loves making dinner more than she loves me!") crop up and take over. The feelings are irrational, but they lurk in the background, and are brought into play by simple, everyday moments. The events may be trivial, but the feelings are not.

Helping Your Child to Feel Connected Again

Once your child regains a sense of connection with you or any other member of the family, he'll be able to take charge again. He'll ask for what he wants, without the "Poor me!" tone that would drive any parent nuts. So when you're feeling adventurous, try offering a good connection with your whining child.

The tricky part about connecting with a child who is full of bad feelings is this: HIS EMOTIONAL TENSION NEEDS AN OUTLET before he'll be able to regain his confidence, his sense that you are on his side. Laughter, crying, or a good tantrum are the typical ways children release bad feelings. A good laugh (but please don't tickle), a good cry (without upset or punishment from you) or a good tantrum (we don't love these, but

they are deeply effective) will clear that gnawing sense of helplessness or aloneness that causes whining.

Offer Closeness And A Clear Limit

This whining remedy may sound very odd and perhaps too permissive to you, if you're a parent that has relied on telling your child what to do, and then punishing him when he can't obey. This approach is designed not to get your child's obedience, but to help his own mind to kick back into gear, so he can THINK FOR HIMSELF and function with confidence again. When children feel connected and close, they almost always know what's appropriate, and they feel motivated to do things that make life good for everyone in the family.

Set your limit with warmth and affection.

The cold tone that most of us use when we say "No" makes a child feel even more alone and adrift in an uncaring world. It deepens the "hole" your child is whining in. If you can say, "Nope, no more cookies! Maybe tomorrow!" with a big grin and a kiss on the cheek, your child begins to have YOU instead of cookies. If he whines some more, you can come back and say, "Nah, nah, nah, nah!" and nuzzle into his neck, ending with a little kiss. If he still whines, you can say, "I'M your chocolate chip cookie! Here I am!" with a big grin. Then throw your arms around him and scoop him up. Because of the affection you're offering, he'll either begin to laugh or begin to cry and tantrum for the cookie you won't give. Both results, as odd as it may seem, are great for him. The laughter, tears, or tantrums help dissolve that shell of separateness that is making him miserable. After a good cry (you keep saying sweetly, "Sorry, Tony, but no more cookies" until he's finished crying) or a good tantrum ("Yes, you really want a cookie. I know, son.") or a good laugh ("I'm the cookie, and I'm coming to give you big cookie kisses! Clomp, clomp, clomp!") your child will be able to feel the love you have for him. And he'll be satisfied with his life again, without the cookies, or the red soccer shirt, or the extra hour of TV watching.

If you can't be playful, being clear but attentive will do.

Playful moments don't come easily to us when our children whine! So if you can't find a way to nuzzle your child or respond with humor to his whiny requests, it will work well to come close and keep saying, with as little irritation as you can manage, "No." Or, "You need to wait." Or "I can't let you do that." Or, "He's playing with it now." Or, "You'll get a turn, but not yet." Being very clear about the limit, and offering eye contact, patience, perhaps a hand on his shoulder or leg, and some warmth if you can find some, will help your child work himself into the cry or the tantrum or laughter he needs to do. Children know how to release feelings. It's a healing process they use instinctively. All they need is for us to pay attention to them long enough to communicate that we'll stay with them through this rough patch.

Allow for laughter, tantrums or tears for as long as you have time and patience.

Children whine because loads of feelings have backed up inside them. When they finally break into a good wail or thrash, they're not just working through the frustration of not getting the cookie or the red soccer shirt. They're working through having a younger brother or sister, or having to say good bye to you every day to go to school, or missing their Grandma who moved away. Children will relax and feel generous again when they are allowed to process the bad feelings until they don't feel bad any longer. Sometimes we parents don't have as much time as our children want for their cry or tantrum or laughing game. But a good 10 or 20 minutes, with a parent who won't blame or shame them for having a big stack of feelings, is a huge relief for a child. You'll gain more than 20 minutes worth of easy going in the family, by making that investment.

It takes a conscious decision to pay attention to a whining child!

The hard part about trying the experiments above is that whining triggers all kinds of irrational feelings inside of us! When we have feelings surging, we don't think logically either. And so we react, sometimes behaving the way our parents did when we whined as children. In turn, our parents reacted to us in the same ways their parents reacted to them. The reactions we have to whining have been passed down through the generations in our families, each generation usually managing a milder version of reaction than the generation before it.

So it takes some mental preparation to decide to move toward a whining child and pay attention, rather than trying to fix him or trying to force him into some other kind of behavior.

We have feelings of resentment, of exhaustion, of anger, of being manipulated, of wanting to hurt someone, of helplessness. We don't want to be having these responses to our precious children, but we do! What helps us is the same thing that helps our children--having someone listen while we say how we feel, and show how we feel. Every parent deserves someone to listen, over and over again, to how hard it can get to care for a child or children. Nurturing children is work that stirs more emotions than almost any other project we'll ever undertake. We do the very best we can. Finding ways to be heard (by other adults who won't get alarmed or try to fix us) is an important part of our job as parents. You might be interested in the PLI booklet, "Listening Partnerships for Parents," that outlines how you can create a listening exchange for yourself, so you have a regular outlet for the feelings that build up over the days and weeks with your child.

Even ten minutes of telling a friend what it really feels like when things are hard, out of earshot of your child, will give you a better chance of moving toward your whining child with a sense of generosity and of interest in what results this new approach might bring.

Your Child Wants You

When your child is whining, he isn't "out to get you" in a manipulative way! He doesn't

really want you to "give in" to his requests. He DOES want to have that sense of closeness with you that makes his world a safe and hopeful place. And a good cry, with you by his side, or a good laugh, with you keeping the fun going for a few moments, will restore his sense of power and connection. It's work, but has big rewards for both of you.

^ ^

Parent Success Story: My Daughter's Need for A Video Disappears

My 8-year-old daughter wanted to watch a video and eat her dinner at the same time. My husband and I have often had a hard time setting limits with her. We tend to give in to her wants, even though we don't really think it's a good idea, because she looks so miserable when she's not getting what she asks for. We get confused about the right thing to do.

On this evening, I didn't really think it was a good time for her to watch the video, and especially not while eating dinner. So I said no. She began getting upset, and begged and pleaded. I sat down next to her and started touching her gently and kept saying, "No, I want you to have dinner with us." She finally began to cry hard. I stayed with her, looked at her, and kept saying as gently as I could, "No, you can't watch the video now. You can eat dinner with us." After crying a long while, she said she wouldn't eat dinner at all. I told her that would be all right, that she didn't have to eat dinner. She cried some more, then said, "Now I *can't* eat dinner because I'm crying so much because you won't let me watch the video!" By this time, I had gone and gotten my own dinner, and was eating it while sitting beside her and touching her and listening. I said something like, "Well, when you're ready, there will be some dinner for you if you want it." She eventually stopped crying, decided to eat dinner, and was absolutely fine. She wasn't upset with me, ate well, and dropped the whole idea of the video. Setting the limit and listening seemed to make sure that she and I were in good communication, and this has made me so much less afraid to say no. I now know how to make things right between us by hanging in there while she cries.
--a mother in Marina, California.

^ ^

Please send your stories of how you've used the PLI approach to parenting. We'd love to hear about what you've learned, and to share it with other parents.

^ ^

NEWS

** "A Fresh Approach to Tantrums," by Patty Wipfler, will appear in the November/December issue of Mothering magazine. It outlines the PLI approach to tantrums in a bit more detail than the tantrums pamphlet PLI publishes. You can find

Mothering in many health food stores, libraries, and on the magazine racks at larger booksellers.

** On November 16th, PLI is offering a PlayMorning for children 2 to 9 years old. Parents who have had some introduction to the PLI approach, their children, and relatives or friends are welcome. We play hard (pillowfights and chasing are big with the older children), make sure each child gets Special Time with his or her parent, and get Playlistening going when we can. Often, children find ways to let big feelings bubble to the surface after an hour or so of play and attention, and we mentor parents as they listen to the feelings and help their children work them through. It's a place where it's safe for your child to be himself, where children's difficulties are seen as opportunities for us all to learn, and where every parent gets listened to at some time during the morning. Join us! For details, see our events calendar at www.parentleaders.org.

** We're collecting great stories from parents about how they're using the PLI approach with their children in all kinds of situations. Would you like to help us transcribe these stories into Word documents? You will hear some great parent stories, and be instrumental in bringing great information and inspiration to parents. E-mail us at info@parentleaders.org if you'd like to explore this volunteer job.

** Buy our booklets, tapes, and videos online! You now can obtain everything we publish with a click of your mouse at www.parentleaders.org We're pleased to make it easy for parents to obtain good, effective information from PLI. If you are buying more than 10 items, you will receive a 10% discount from PLI if you order by mail, fax, or over the phone. We don't offer this discount online, so keep our phone number handy too: 650-322-5323, fax (650) 322-5179.

** We'd like to hear how you're using the parenting tips and articles we're sending you. If you duplicate our articles for your parent group, nursery school, or church or temple Sunday school, please let us know. You're free to spread the word! We'd love to hear where and with whom. Tell us at info@parentleaders.org

** You can help PLI and appear in print! We're looking for great photos that show close communication between you and your child. We can't return any photos you send us, but if you have a copy you're willing to part with, send it to us at P.O. Box 50492, Palo Alto, CA 94303. If we decide to use it, we'll let you know and get your specific permission. We'll enjoy what you send, guaranteed.

^ ^

PASS IT ON!

Do you know parents who would find our newsletter helpful? Zap it to them! To obtain past issues, write us at [<info@parentleaders.org>](mailto:info@parentleaders.org)

^ ^

To subscribe:

Click on <http://lists.parentleaders.org/mailman/listinfo/pli-newsletter>

PLI will never share your address with any other organization. We publish our newsletter once every six weeks.

To unsubscribe:

Send us an e-mail at info@parentleaders.org with Unsubscribe in the Subject heading.

^ ^

To give a tax-deductible donation to Parents Leadership Institute, click the Donate Now! button on the splash page of www.parentleaders.org It only takes a moment! We'd love to add you to the PLI Family of Donors.

^ ^

Contact us at:

P.O. Box 50492

Palo Alto, CA 94303

650-322-5323

Fax 650-322-5179

info@parentleaders.org

^ ^