

# SECRETS OF PARENTING

## Reducing Whining and Improving Young Children's Self-Control

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"No, No, No!"

"I don't want to!"

"It's mine!"

"I hate this...I'm not  
going to try it."

*How many times have you heard your child say these things to you? Does it seem like your child is constantly whining about everything?*

*Parenting young children can be hard work. Young children are very self-centered and think everything revolves around their wants and needs. This is not because they are selfish. They simply do not know any different. Learning about other people's feelings and developing self-control take time.*

*The **secret of parenting** is to help your young child develop self-control by understanding his or her limits. Be patient, loving, and offer supportive guidance to your child.*

**Young children under the age of 6 are very self-centered and think that they should get what they want and need RIGHT NOW. They often get frustrated when they realize that the world does not revolve around them. This frustration can lead to whining and tantrums because they have not developed the self-control to deal with their frustrations.**

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### **You Can Help Your Children Develop Self-Control:**

**Understand young children's limits.** Developing self-control is a long process. It takes time for children to learn how to control themselves socially, physically, and emotionally. Understand your child's limits. Don't expect too much from him or her. For example, at mealtime, it's normal for young children to start whining if they've finished eating and have to sit still at the table for longer than a few minutes. Don't expect your child to sit through hours of adult conversation. Respect your child's limits. Understand that your child won't be happy about grocery shopping with you when she is hungry and overdue for a nap.

**Set appropriate limits to help guide your children.** You can help your children develop more self-control by offering guidance and reasonable rules. Provide this guidance in ways that young children can understand. Young children are focused on the moment. They often learn by doing things. Show your 3-year-old how to put away his toys. Remind your 4-year-old to clean up her room. Tell the child clearly what you mean by a "clean" room. You could say, for example, "A clean room means that your bed is made and the

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toys are on the shelves.” Many, many reminders will be needed along the way. Telling young children once is not enough. Their attention wavers easily, and you may have to repeat the instructions many times.

**Help your child deal with powerful feelings.** Young children often have a hard time communicating their feelings to other people. This can be frustrating for them. When they get frustrated, they may whine, cry, or have a full-blown temper tantrum. When this happens to your child, it is important for you to stay calm so you can help your child through it. Try holding your child and talking in a soothing voice. Name the feeling, and tell your child that together you will work through it. If your child throws a tantrum to get attention, try ignoring the tantrum. If you are at home, take your child to his or her bedroom. If you are in a public place, like a grocery store or restaurant, take your child outside or to a restroom until the tantrum subsides. Once your child has calmed down, talk about the frustrating feelings that caused the tantrum. Help your child identify the feelings and come up with better ways to deal with them. Reassure your child that it’s okay to have strong feelings, and teach him or her how feelings can be expressed in acceptable ways: by telling you about them, by drawing and coloring a picture of them, and by asking you for help. Be sure not to judge your child harshly nor dismiss his or her feelings. Help him or her find acceptable ways to express feelings.

**Celebrate your child’s efforts.** You can help guide the behaviors you want to see by praising your child’s efforts at self-control. For example, if your 3-year-old daughter tries a new food at dinnertime without whining about it, tell her you’re proud of her. If your 4-year-old son plays quietly while you talk on the phone, notice this behavior and praise him for it. Paying attention to the behaviors you want to see will encourage your children to repeat those behaviors. Pay attention when your child is trying to do something good, and let him or her know you are happy with the desired behavior.

**The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service provides several free publications that provide more information about improving your child’s self-control:**

*Growing Together: Preschooler Development (FCS-454)*  
*Guide for Discipline, Part I (FCS-455)*  
*Guide for Discipline, Part II (FCS-456)*  
*Self-Esteem in Children (FCSW-506)*

These publications are available from your county Extension Center, or they can be viewed online by visiting this Web site: [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/humandev/pubs/](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/humandev/pubs/)

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*3,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$281.53 or \$.09 per copy.*