



iQuestions Faculty, Dr. Kevin Leman

Question:

How can I stop my 18-month-old from continual fussing and whining?

Answer:

An age-old question: "How do you get kids, 18-month-old children, to stop whining, fussing?" Well, welcome to parenthood.

Let me tell you about 18-month-old children. I always tell young parents, "Hey, when your child hits 18 months, circle the month and get ready for Armageddon, because this little sucker is going to understand what power is all about." And they're going to pay particular attention to how you react to their powerful, manipulative ways.

What you have to understand is that children are hedonistic little suckers from the get-go. They don't care about the pastor and his wife. They don't care about the grocery clerk. All they care about is themselves. We're the parents. Our job is to train them up, to love them in such a way that they get to think about other people as they grow older. But at 18 months of age, I'm telling you, they're about as hedonistic as they can get.

Now, do they fuss? Yeah. Do they whine? Yeah.

I always get asked, you know, "Hey, what do you do with a whining kid?" My best answer: "Put them in the whine cellar. It's a great place for a whiner, whether at 18 months or 9 years of age. Kids whine for a reason. Why would a kid continue whining? Because it has paid off. See, what you have to understand about young children is every kid is

going to seek attention; the 18-month-old is going to seek attention. When you have relatives over, and he's doing something cute, and they're all pointing and laughing, it's really cute and funny, isn't it? And they're reinforced for that. Company's gone, and he still does the same cute thing for about the nineteenth time. It's not so cute anymore, is it? But notice how the behavior stays around. Why? Because it was reinforced.

So, you've got to be careful here. When kids throw a temper-tantrum for example; take whining and fussing to the eighth degree, right there on the floor of the supermarket; what do you do? You step over the child. There's a great temptation to what? Step on the child! As you step over the child and walk away, what does the 18-month-old child do? They run after you. "Mommy, Mommy, wait for me!" Why? Because the temper-tantrum is thrown for who's benefit? Yours.

The child is saying, "Hey, parent. I'm in authority over you. You're going to do what I want you to do." Now, again, don't take my word for it on this one. You just go out to a park. You go out to a mall. You go to a store and you tell me what you see. Kids, shorter than a yardstick, in full control of adults. I saw a grandma with her grandson at the supermarket, and grandma went to reach for something. And the kid, who couldn't have been 19-20 months old is going, "No, *that* one." 19 months old! Can you imagine that?

So, you need to be a healthy authority over kids. I'm just telling you that kids who are whining and fussing continue to do that because we've paid them off. How do you un-pay it? You pick them up; you remove them from the scene. That's one of the best disciplinary measures you'll find with an 18-month-old child.

By the way, there's a brand new invention. It's called a playpen. It's a great place to put a whiner. It's a great place to put a kid who's fussing. It says, "You know what? You've got a right to fuss and whine,

but you're going to do it here. You're not going to do it on my leg." And what kids do is they'll come up and they'll grab your leg, and they'll just fuss and whine, and they demand that you pay attention to them. So, not only are they attention-getters, but they are powerful children. Their lifestyle, the way they're looking at life seems to be saying, "I only count in life when I dominate, control, and win." That's the powerful little buzzard.

My friend Jim Dobson calls them "the strong-willed child." I call them powerful little buzzards. Either terminology, you understand it. But you need to draw some lines. How you're going to behave and how you're going to respond to this kid's behavior; which you don't want to have current in his life.

So, you be the parent: stand up, face him best you can; remove him from the scene lovingly and gently. That's your best bet with a fussing kid. Good luck.