

Complaining

Complaining, from the Medieval Latin *complangere*: *com* ‘bewail’ + *plangere* ‘to lament,’ means to express dissatisfaction or annoyance about a state of affairs or an event. A discussion about complaining wouldn’t be complete without mentioning its first cousin, whining. From the Old English *whinan* ‘whistle through the air,’ whining means to complain in a feeble or petulant way. Combining those two words, as in a ‘whining complainer,’ certainly doesn’t paint a very complementary picture.

People complain about anything that doesn’t meet their approval. Fact is, most everyone complains at one time or another. It just feels too good not to.

Reason #1 We want our emotions validated. “I’m feeling depressed. What does she see in him?”

Reason #2 We want sympathy. “My allergies are really bad today.”

Reason #3 We want a problem fixed. “Why doesn’t Mrs. Powers hand out assignments at the beginning of class? What’s her problem?”

Reason #4 We want to vent over our powerlessness. “The light’s green! Why doesn’t that guy go?”

So where’s the line between complaining and a constructive discussion? Unlike complaining, everyone participates in a discussion. Together, they work to get their arms around an issue and solve it—or at least understand it better. Discussions reveal new perspectives that you might not have considered. That, in turn, can help you deal with whatever it is that’s on your mind.

Want to stop complaining?

Solution #1 Need your emotions validated? Find someone who’ll listen. Say your piece and move on.

Solution #2 Looking for sympathy? Don’t.

Solution #3 Need help? Ask.

Solution #4 Want to vent? Pause-think-understand-then respond.

Complaining Dos and Don'ts

- Discuss it.
- Get over it.
- Move on.

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