

Feeling confident: Techniques to help you address pediatric vaccine hesitancy


Despite vaccine hesitancy, most parents consider their child's health care providers (HCPs) to be the most trusted source of vaccine information.¹ You can be influential in helping them make the decision to vaccinate their child.^{1,2} In this guide, you'll find techniques to help you have more efficient and productive conversations with parents about childhood vaccination.



Actor Portrayals

Four pillars of engagement

The goals when talking to parents about vaccination are to:

- 1**  **Communicate**
 Establish honest and respectful two-way dialogue, discuss specific vaccine concerns, and have follow-up discussions with parents who continue to express hesitancy^{2,3}
- 2**  **Advocate**
 Share why you believe vaccines are important for their children and make parents aware of CDC-recommended vaccinations for their children's age group⁴
- 3**  **Educate**
 Provide reputable information sources, acknowledge that vaccine risks do exist but are generally outweighed by the benefits, and explain that vaccine-preventable diseases can reemerge^{3,4}
- 4**  **Coordinate care**
 Take note of a patient's vaccination status, make the necessary recommendations, and set up follow-up appointments/reminders to help ensure they follow the recommended vaccination schedule¹

With these four pillars in mind, you can employ the techniques in this guide—[motivational interviewing](#) and [debunking](#)—to help parents feel confident about vaccination. Each technique can be impactful on its own, so choose what works best for you and your practice.⁵⁻⁸

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a set of evidence-based, patient-centered communication techniques focused on being empathetic, nonjudgmental, and supportive. By utilizing a person's willingness to change, you can collaborate with them to work through and resolve their own hesitancy and uncertainty.⁵ Involving parents in the problem-solving process can help them decide to vaccinate their children using their own reasoning, as people are more likely to believe what they hear themselves say.^{5,9} **Here are some MI techniques that can help move parents toward vaccination:**



Reflective listening

Ask parents to express their beliefs. Then, return what the parent has said and ask them to confirm if you've understood them correctly.⁹

Why it may work:

Reflective listening lets parents add nuance to or correct what they've just said.¹⁰ It also allows them to hear again the thoughts and feelings they are expressing in different words, and possibly talk more about it.⁹

Example conversation

Parent: Can we save this vaccine for her next appointment?

HCP: It sounds like you'd prefer an alternative vaccination schedule. Could you help me understand why?



Actor Portrayals



Asking open-ended questions

Invite parents to actively participate in the conversation and elaborate on their beliefs so they feel heard and understood without judgment.^{9,11}

Why it may work:

Open-ended questions allow parents to reflect and elaborate on their beliefs. Learning more about their perspective can help you understand what motivates them and create a plan to change.⁹

Example conversation

Parent: I didn't know he needed 3 shots today, that seems like a lot!

HCP: I'm sorry we didn't talk about this more during our last visit. Can you help me understand what you're concerned will happen if he gets three shots today instead of one?

Motivational interviewing *(continued)*



Making affirmations⁹

Create a comfortable environment where parents may be more open to change. Reassure parents by validating their motivations and good intentions to do what's best for their child.

Why it may work:

Recognizing the parent's strengths, abilities, good intentions, and efforts can lead them toward positive change.

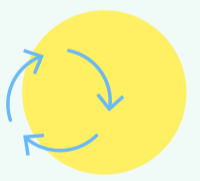
Example conversation

Parent: I don't know if I feel comfortable vaccinating my child today. Something I saw on social media made me question if they're safe.

HCP: I understand that you just want to make the best decision for your child and it can be hard when you're unsure what information is true and what is not. It's ok to have questions¹¹—do you want to discuss the risks and benefits of vaccines together?



Actor Portrayals



Elicit-provide-elicite

First, elicit parents' permission to talk about vaccines. If they agree, provide them with fact-based statements. Then, elicit how they feel knowing that information.⁵

Why it may work:

This method can help reinforce the parent's autonomy, lower their resistance, and make them more willing to listen. It also encourages parents to share their feelings and participate in the conversation.^{5,10}

Example conversation

HCP: Would it be okay if we talked about vaccination?

Parent: Sure.

HCP: The CDC's recommended immunization schedule is carefully designed to help protect your baby at the right time. If you wait until your baby is exposed to germs that a vaccine could help fight against, there may not be enough time for the vaccine to work.¹² How do you feel about that?

Debunking

Misinformation is false information shared by people who do not intend to mislead others.

Disinformation is false information purposely created and shared with malicious intent.¹³

Misinformation and disinformation can be attention-grabbing—which is why false beliefs may ‘stick’ in people’s minds and influence their thinking even after they’ve been corrected.⁸

Debunking means presenting a corrective message that establishes the prior message was misinformation. When debunking, aim to⁸:

- **Lead with the fact.** It should be simple and clear.
- **Repeat the misinformation** only once, directly after the correction.
- **Explain why the misinformation is incorrect** and point out any fallacies employed.
- **Restate the fact again** so it’s the last thing people process.

Why it may work:

A correction may actually lead to someone strengthening their belief in the misconception being corrected. Alternatively, debunking explains *why* a message is false, and what may have led people to believe it in the first place, in clear and simple terms.⁸

Example conversation

Parent: I’ve heard these vaccines aren’t even necessary anymore.

HCP: Every recommended dose of each vaccine is important to help protect your baby from potentially serious diseases.¹² There are rumors that children no longer need to get vaccinated.² But, serious diseases still exist and outbreaks still occur in the US. Even diseases that were eliminated in the US can infect unvaccinated babies if travelers bring the diseases from other countries.⁴



Actor Portrayals

Remember, it’s always important to be **understanding, respectful, and nonjudgmental** with parents who are expressing their concerns—like you, they want to do what’s best for their child.¹¹

Using this guide can help you have productive conversations with parents and improve vaccination rates in your practice.^{6,7,10}



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