

Addressing parental vaccine hesitancy

- As a health care provider, parents—including those who are hesitant—consider you the most trusted source of information when it comes to vaccines.¹
- One observational study found that when providers continued to engage vaccine-hesitant parents, up to **47%** ultimately accepted vaccines after initial resistance.^{2,a}
- There are some effective techniques you can use that may help make a difference in their decision.¹⁻³



^aIn a cross-sectional observational study, multivariate logistic regression was used to explore the association between provider communication practices and parent resistance to vaccines. 111 vaccine discussions with parents of children aged 1 to 19 months were analyzed from September 2011 through August 2012. Of 19 parents who were initially resistant to the provider's vaccine recommendation, 47% subsequently accepted the provider's recommendation immediately after providers pursued it.²



First, try the presumptive approach

Opening the conversation with a statement (eg, "Your child needs 3 shots today.")¹—rather than a question—leads to more parents accepting vaccinations for their children.^{2,4,5}



Learn useful techniques for approaching parents with similar hesitations by selecting one of the scenarios below:

Hesitation may sound like:

“I’d like to vaccinate my child on my own schedule. Does it need to happen today?”



Reflective listening starts by allowing parents to express their beliefs. After they share, try to interpret the meaning behind their answer and ask them to clarify if you've understood them correctly.⁶

Example Conversation

Parent: I'd like to delay my child's vaccinations. Can we save this for her next appointment?

HCP: I'm hearing that you'd like an alternative vaccination schedule. Could you help me understand why?

Parent: It just seems like a lot all at once, and I'm not sure if it's safe.

HCP: I can understand being concerned about your child's safety. But if you don't vaccinate your child, there's a real chance they could get sick.⁷



The Science of Persuasion

Tell parents the bottom-line meaning or the “gist” of a message to help them remember and take action on the information you provided. Messages with gists are expected to be more compelling to parents than those that simply state facts verbatim.^{5,7}

“I’ve heard a lot of conflicting information, and I don’t know what to believe.”



Making affirmations creates 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.⁶

Example Conversation

Parent: I’ve heard a lot of conflicting information, and I don’t know what to believe.

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. Can you tell me about anything specific that I can help clear up?

Parent: Well, my best friend read something on social media and now she doesn’t want to vaccinate her family.

HCP: It’s good that you have someone you trust who can share their personal choices like that. I can tell you that I choose to vaccinate my own family and strongly recommend that all those I’m close with do the same.⁸

The Science of Persuasion

Providers who share their own personal stories may stand a better chance of connecting with vaccine-hesitant parents.⁸ Parents want to hear that you vaccinate your children, or about other personal experiences you have with vaccination.⁸

“I didn’t know he needed 3 shots today, that seems like a lot!”



Asking open-ended questions invites parents to actively participate in the conversation and elaborate on their beliefs.⁶

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. What worries you about vaccinating today?

Parent: Well, they don't all seem necessary to me. I didn't get some of these vaccines and I was fine.

HCP: I see why you could think that. But I think it's worth mentioning that about 70% of children have had their recommended childhood vaccinations by age two.^{9,10,a,b}*

It's really common and something we strongly recommend at this age.^{9,10}

*Providing parents with childhood vaccination data from your own practice or geographic area may make this statement more impactful.

⁶National Immunization Survey-Child data from survey years 2017–2019 were combined to identify 25,970 children with adequate provider data who were born in 2016 and 2017. Children with at least one vaccination reported by a provider and those who had received no vaccinations were considered to have adequate provider data. Kaplan-Meier (time to event) analysis was used to estimate vaccination coverage for most vaccines by age 24 months while still using information from children whose vaccination status was assessed at age 19–23 months.⁹

^bRecommended vaccinations per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s child and adolescent immunization schedule for ages 18 years or younger.¹⁰



The Science of Persuasion

Social norms play a key role in parents' decision-making process.¹¹ Remind parents that most children are vaccinated to reinforce that it's a social norm.⁹

“What about vaccine side effects?”



First, **elicit parents' permission** to talk about vaccines, and provide any facts they may want to know. Then, elicit how they feel knowing that information.¹²

Example Conversation

Parent: I'm not sure I want her to get those shots. I'm a little concerned about the side effects.

HCP: Okay. What concerns you the most?

Parent: Well, I've heard they can be dangerous.

HCP: That's understandable. Vaccines can cause reactions that are usually mild and go away within a few days on their own, such as a low-grade fever or pain and redness at the injection site.¹³

It's been found that long-lasting, severe side effects are extremely rare.¹³ Does that help address your concerns?

Parent: No, I'm still not sure.

HCP: Okay. I'll share some more information for you to read, and we can talk about this again at her next visit.

The Science of Persuasion

Show parents you understand their concerns by providing them with both the benefits and risks of vaccines. Parents report feeling adequately informed about the benefits, but under-informed about the risks, which can lead them to be skeptical.¹⁴ It can be helpful to acknowledge that parents ask for all the information because they want to do what's best for their child.

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