



Talking to Friends and Family about the COVID-19 Vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine is our chance to get back together with our family, friends, coworkers, classmates, and communities. The decision to get vaccinated is personal. Some people may want to get vaccinated, but may not know how to get an appointment or get transportation to a vaccination site. Some want to know that someone who is like them has gotten the vaccine or is excited to get it. Any number of concerns may hold a person back from getting vaccinated, and talking to a friend or family member can help break through those barriers.

You can be a trusted messenger and helper to your friends and family. As someone the person already knows and trusts, you can find out what is concerning your friend or family member about the vaccine, relate on a personal level, and share information to help them on their journey to deciding to get vaccinated. In fact, it's been shown that **people who know someone who has already been vaccinated are 40% more likely to say they'll get vaccinated themselves.**¹

You don't have to be a medical expert to make an impact. **Effective conversations about the vaccine are rooted in active listening and empathy.** Active listening helps you connect over shared values and guide the person to make their own decision.

TIPS FOR AN ACTIVE LISTENING CONVERSATION

Listen to understand, not to respond: As you listen, try to fully understand the person's perspective. Don't form your reply before the person is done speaking. If you have a response fully baked, you may be thinking too much about what you are going to say and miss out on listening fully enough to discern the values, concerns, and motivations that inform the person's opinion. Minimize any distractions around you so that you can give your undivided attention.

Repeat back or state a summary: After the person finishes speaking, repeat back to them what you heard in a summary statement. This will help you position yourself in the speaker's point of

¹ Source: [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)

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view and confirm that you have understood them correctly. For example, you could say: *“Thank you for sharing that with me. What I am hearing you say is [INSERT SUMMARY STATEMENT]....”*

Ask questions to get to the root of the concern: Sometimes people may not fully express their “why.” In order to learn more about what someone believes or values, or what is at the root of their feelings, you can ask them questions to try to better understand. Asking questions also lets them know that you are not making assumptions and that you value their thoughts and experiences.

“What is it about doctors that makes you nervous? When you say you are worried about the safety of the vaccine, what do you mean?” or “So you’re nervous about side effects? [Pause to listen and prompt the person if needed:] Tell me more.”

Respond without judgement: These conversations need to be open and honest to build trust. If the person feels judged, they will likely shut down and avoid sharing their sincere thoughts. Sometimes preconceived notions or any unintentional prejudice or bias may cause you to form assumptions; avoid making and acting on those assumptions and approach the conversation with an open mind.

“I see where you’re coming from. It can be hard to know what information on social media is real when there is so much misinformation and clickbait.”

Express empathy and connect on values: Acknowledge and relate to what the person is sharing. Validating concerns, expressing empathy, and demonstrating that you understand will help make the person feel more comfortable.

“That must be frustrating and scary to worry about missing a day of work and making rent.”

Pair shared values with key facts: As you surface what the person’s concerns or motivations are, focus the conversation around the values you hear them express and relate those values to yourself. Then you can connect those values to the benefits of the vaccine.

“I also really care about not taking chances with my personal health. I know it seems like the vaccines came out all of the sudden. Health experts have been working on the technology for these kinds of vaccines for years, and there was a massive effort and a lot of money put into

developing them. I know so many people who have gotten the vaccine and are fine, and now millions of people are getting vaccinated every day."

Compare alternatives and guide to decision: Help the person see what might happen to themselves, their family, or community if they don't take the vaccine. Build this response based on the shared values you have identified that you think they will care most about. Then use this as an opportunity to guide the person to voice their opinion and invite them to change their mind. Don't tell them what to do or think. It is important to guide a person to make their own decision rather than the lecture or dictate what someone should do or think.

"I am a bit worried about side effects after the vaccine as well. I am personally going to get vaccinated because I think it's better than getting a bad case of COVID. My grandma spent a month in the hospital with COVID, and my boss who is young and healthy missed work for a week. So I think the risk of not getting vaccinated is much worse than the risk of maybe having side effects for a few days."

Starting a conversation about vaccination:

Have these conversations as part of your daily life, or use them as an opportunity to catch up and check in with your friends and family. To start the conversation, you can simply ask if the person has been vaccinated yet.

"Have you gotten your vaccine?"

Speak in your own voice - the examples in the guide are simply that. Adapt the conversation to your circumstances. For example:

- *"I see so many of our [CHURCH FRIENDS/COUSINS/CLASSMATES/COWORKERS/NEIGHBORS] are getting vaccinated!"*
- *"Eligibility is expanding soon for the vaccines."*
- *"Do you want me to help you get an appointment?"*
- *"Did you hear that the Safeway down the block is a vaccine site?"*

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Identify vaccine access issues:

Consider that your friends and family may already be thinking about getting a vaccine, but may not know how to get an appointment, may not have transportation, or may just have a few simple questions before they are ready to make an appointment. In particular, people who are unfamiliar with using the internet, people without a car, people who work long hours, or people without health insurance may have concerns about accessing a vaccine appointment and getting to the vaccine site.

Here are examples of concerns and how you might respond:

The vaccine was made too quickly.

- **Reflect:** “What I’m hearing you say is that you’re worried they cut corners on the vaccine and rushed it out.”
- **Connect on values:** “I care about making informed choices for my body and my health. I would also be worried about taking something that I didn’t think was safe.”
- **Guide to decision:** “But these vaccines use technology that health experts have been working on for many years, long before COVID-19 was around, and they have done a lot of testing on different kinds of people. Millions of people have gotten it safely and are now protected. What I’m more concerned about is the harm the virus will do to me or my family – I want to get the vaccine to keep myself and them safe.”²

I’d be fine if I got COVID-19, so I don’t need the vaccine.

- **Reflect:** “What I’m hearing you saying is that you aren’t worried about the impact that COVID-19 will have on your health and safety.”
- **Connect on values:** “While you and I are both young and healthy, I’m worried about passing the virus on to my grandmother who might not be able to fight it off.”
- **Guide to decision:** “The vaccine will help prevent us from spreading the disease to people we love who could get really sick or die, and it will also protect us from getting super sick or ending up in the hospital.”

² Source: [CDC](#)

The vaccine wasn't tested on people who look like me.

- **Reflect:** "What I'm hearing you say is that you don't think they did enough research to understand how the vaccine will affect you."
- **Express Empathy:** "I know that feeling might worry you that it's not safe or people don't care about the side effects for you."
- **Guide to decision:** "But all of the vaccines were studied in volunteers who look like all of America – volunteers were Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, white, young, old, healthy, not healthy, rural, and urban. And now millions of people from all backgrounds and countries have gotten the vaccines."³

Here are a some ways to think about shared values:

- **Think about your own motivation and underlying values for getting vaccinated:**
 - "I want to get back to seeing friends and family without worrying about getting each other sick."
 - Values: friends and family, being considerate of others, experiencing life's precious moments, personal freedom
 - "I want to protect my own health."
 - Values: personal health, safety, longevity, quality of life
 - "I want to not worry for my health when I do daily activities like going to work and to the grocery store."
 - Values: peace of mind, safety, personal health
 - "I want to do my part to protect vulnerable people in my community."
 - Values: community accountability, compassion for the suffering of others
 - "I want to do my part to end the pandemic."
 - Public service, community accountability, supporting the local economy, supporting the continuity of educational and cultural institutions
- As you listen to your friends and family talk about their experience in the pandemic, listen for their underlying values and think about how their values may be similar to yours.

³ Source: [Ad Council and COVID Collaborative](#)

Here are a few ways you wrap up a conversation:

- If the person is now enthusiastic about getting vaccinated AND they are eligible for vaccination: “I’m so glad you’re feeling good about vaccination. Since you are eligible now to get vaccinated, can I help you find an appointment?” or “I’m so glad you’re feeling good about vaccination. I have heard that [VACCINE PROVIDER/LOCATION] has appointments available, do you want help getting an appointment?”
- If the person is now open to getting vaccinated but is not yet eligible for vaccination: “I’m so glad you are feeling good about vaccination. I believe in [STATE OF RESIDENCE] you will be eligible to get vaccinated as early as [DATE]. Can I circle back once your group is eligible and help you find an appointment?”
- If the person is still unsure about getting vaccinated: “I understand, it’s a really personal decision. Can I circle back with you in a few weeks once you know more people who have been vaccinated?”
- If the person may need a ride to a vaccine site: “Do you have a way of getting there? I can drive you!”

Helpful resources to check out

There are several ways to find trusted information about vaccines, COVID-19, and vaccine conversations. Your local public health department and medical professionals are good resources. Additionally, the resources below can help you have vaccine conversations.

- **COVID Collaborative and Ad Council:** [Vaccine FAQ](#)
- **Greater Than COVID:** [Video of healthcare professionals answering questions](#)
- **NIH:** [Tip Sheet for Communicating about COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- **New York Times:** [Opinion | The Science of Reasoning With Unreasonable People](#)
- **CDC:** [Vaccine Conversations with Parents](#)
- **CDC:** [Preparing for questions parents may ask about vaccines](#)
- **Vaccinate Your Family:** [FAQs about COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- **Stat:** [The vaccine whisperers: Counselors gently engage new parents before their doubts harden into certainty](#)
- **Motivational Interviewing:** motivationalinterviewing.org

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Toolkit Sources: Motivational Interviewing, OFA Legacy Training, and Kaiser Family Foundation.

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