



Tips for Talking to Head Start Staff and Families About the COVID-19 Vaccines

The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States have been shown to be safe and effective at preventing COVID-19. Most people are planning to be vaccinated. Others may feel nervous about vaccine safety and side effects and want to know more before committing. By taking time to listen to their concerns and answer their questions, you can help your Head Start staff and families become confident in making the right decision for themselves. This resource includes strategies for talking with Head Start staff and families about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Understand Concerns

Before you share information about the vaccines, it's helpful to ask if there are concerns. You might start the conversation by asking, "How do you feel about the vaccines that are available?" If they are uncertain, ask if it's OK to discuss their concerns. With permission to continue, you could say, "May I ask what makes you feel concerned? What kinds of things are you hearing about the vaccine?" Since some people may not feel comfortable trusting the medical system or the government to keep them safe, you can ask questions such as, "What have been your experiences with the medical community? What are your concerns about the government's role in these vaccines?"

Use Reflective Listening and Summarizing Strategies

Reflective listening and summarizing are conversational skills that can help to show your genuine interest in someone's ideas. Reflective listening takes place when you seek to understand someone else's perspective. It includes restating and clarifying what the other person is saying to make sure you really understand the meaning of their communication. Summarizing happens when you pull from what you are hearing to tie together a few different points.

After you make reflections or summarize, don't forget to make sure you're on the right track by asking something like, "Is that what you mean?" The point is not to change the other person's mind, but to make sure they feel heard and respected. Helping people feel heard increases communication and their confidence in their ability to decide what to do. It also leaves open the possibility for discussing topics that are more challenging.

Provide Accurate Information

It is not within a Head Start staff member's role to provide medical advice or to convince people to be vaccinated. Instead, you can provide guidance from reliable sources about the vaccines.

Explore myths and facts about the COVID-19 vaccine from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>

Watch a series of videos featuring Black health care providers from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) talking about the vaccines: <https://www.greatertanccovid.org/the-conversation-videos-all/>

Learn how to determine if online health information is reliable: <https://vaccineinformation.org/internet-immunization-info/>

To offer these resources, you could say, "Head Start programs are sharing the latest CDC guidance on vaccine safety and effectiveness. Would it be OK if we talk through some resources and information I have?" It might also be helpful for folks to hear from someone who has already been vaccinated. Offer this as a resource if staff and family members in your program or community have been vaccinated and are willing to share their experiences.



Leave Room for Future Communication

Remember, the goal is to help a person feel comfortable discussing concerns, not to immediately change their mind. End the conversation with a hopeful note, such as, “I really appreciate you sharing your concerns with me. I hope we can meet again to see what you think after reflecting on our conversation or reading more information.” Ask for permission to have another chance to talk and to keep the communication flowing.

Sample Conversation

Speaker A: I want to check in with you about the COVID-19 vaccine. How are you feeling about the vaccines that are available?

Speaker B: I am not getting that vaccine — no way!

A: Would it be OK to discuss your concerns? [*asking permission to discuss concerns*]

B: Sure, that’s fine.

A: May I ask why you are hesitant? What kinds of things are you hearing about the vaccines?

B: Well, they got those vaccines out way too quickly for them to be safe. I don’t trust that the vaccines work, and I’m not going to take the risk of getting COVID-19 from that shot. I’ve heard about the bad side effects, too.

A: OK, so I definitely hear you are concerned about whether the vaccines are safe and are wondering if they even work. I also picked up on you saying you are worried about side effects and whether you are at risk of getting COVID-19 from the vaccine. Am I getting all of that right? [*reflective listening and summarizing*]

B: Yep! Can’t blame me for saying I won’t do it, huh?

A: I am definitely not here to blame you or to ask you to change your mind. We have been hearing similar things from others, so Head Start programs are sharing the latest CDC guidance on vaccine safety and effectiveness. Would it be OK to talk through some

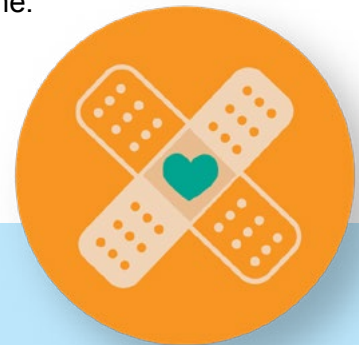


resources I have here? It looks like the CDC has directly answered some of the questions you have. [*offering resources such as [Myths and Facts About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)*]

B: OK, I’ll take a look.

A: I really appreciate you sharing your concerns with me. I would love to talk about this again after we both have some time to reflect on our conversation and the CDC information. Would it be OK for me to check in about this again soon? [*leaving room for future conversations*]

B: Sure, that sounds fine with me.



Related Resources

- [What Is Motivational Interviewing?](#)
- [Different COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [Key Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccines for School Staff and Childcare Workers](#)
- [KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#)



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