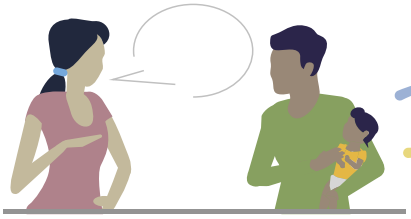
A 5-step approach to discussing vaccines and addressing vaccine hesitancy

STEP 1
Assume person will immunize. Use a presumptive statement.

Person consents with no further questions?

Person is hesitant?

STEP 2
Give your strong recommendation.



Person consents with no further questions?

Person is still hesitant?

STEP 3
Explore the reason for hesitancy.

- Listen to what the person says.
- Use motivational interviewing techniques to determine the cause of hesitancy.

STEP 4
Ask permission to address concerns.

- If person agrees, use the Ask-Provide-Verify approach to deliver information to address concerns.

STEP 5
Ask again if you can immunize.

Person consents with no further questions?

Person is hesitant?

Leave the door open for future discussion.

IMMUNIZE

A 5-step approach to discussing vaccines and addressing vaccine hesitancy

continued

Step 1 - Assume the person will immunize. Use a presumptive statement.

A presumptive statement has been found to be more effective in increasing vaccine uptake than a participatory ask.

Example of a presumptive statement:

- *"Your son is due for his 4-month vaccines. We will give him these vaccines before you leave today."*

Example of a participatory ask:

- *"What would you like to do about your son's 4-month vaccines?"*

Presumptive statement = more effective

Participatory ask = less effective

If the person consents with no further questions, immunize. It's important not to plant a reason for hesitancy in someone who already supports vaccines. If the person is hesitant or unsure, move to Step 2.

Step 2 - Give your strong recommendation.

Studies show that parents consistently rank health care providers as their most trusted source of vaccine information and that the strength of the recommendation from the health care provider can influence a person's decision to vaccinate. Your strong recommendation is crucial for vaccine acceptance. Clearly state your recommendation and, if appropriate, add supporting statements.

Example:

- *"I strongly recommend your child gets these vaccines today. These vaccines are very important to protect your child against serious diseases."*

If the person consents with no further questions, immunize. If the person is hesitant or unsure, move to Step 3.

Step 3 - Explore the reason for hesitancy.

Listen to what the person says and use motivational interviewing (MI) techniques to understand their concerns. MI is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change. Its aim is to strengthen a person's own motivation and commitment to their goals by eliciting and exploring their own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.

OARS (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries) is one of the foundational skills used in MI. Examples using OARS to understand a person's specific vaccine concerns are included throughout this tool.

Refer to appendix A: in the 2021 Immunization Communication Tool for more information on MI and the use of "mini" MI in the context of an immunization appointment.

Step 4 - Ask permission to address concerns.

After listening to the person's concerns, ask permission to address their concerns. If the person agrees, it is important to properly deliver information to address their concerns. One way to do this is to use the Ask-Provide-Verify approach. In this approach, the health care provider will ask the person what they know about the specific reason for hesitancy, provide information to address the issue, and then verify that the information has been understood. After providing information and verifying understanding, it can be helpful to summarize key messages.

Examples using the Ask-Provide-Verify approach when delivering information to address a person's concerns are included throughout this tool.

Step 5 - Ask again if you can immunize.

Ask the person again if you can immunize.

Example:

- *"I hope I was able to address your concerns regarding the safety of vaccines. I really want to ensure your daughter is protected against these diseases. Can I provide the immunizations now?"*

If the person consents, it is important to immunize at the same visit. If they are still hesitant, it is important to leave the door open for future discussion.

Example:

- *"I know you have your child's best interests at heart. If you ever want to discuss this further, please call me."*

Adapted from *"Moving to Acceptance: How to address vaccine hesitancy in your busy practice"* with permission from the Canadian Paediatric Society.

For more information on the 5 step approach to discussing vaccines and addressing vaccine hesitancy go to the 2021 Immunization Communication Tool for health care providers.