

# A CONVERSATION GUIDE TO HELP BUILD CONFIDENCE IN THE VACCINE AGAINST COVID-19

One of the best ways to help people gain the information and confidence they need to accept the vaccine is a one-on-one conversation with someone that they trust. In scholarship, this is identified as “motivational interviews.” Motivational interviewing can strengthen a willingness to act by helping individuals identify their own reasons for doing so. Motivational interviewing requires strong listening skills, respect and sincere curiosity. The technique is most effective when people are ambivalent or don’t see getting a vaccine as especially important.

Critically, this technique should not be used to argue, berate, win or debunk. Those approaches can backfire and leave someone even more determined to stick to their original choice.

Here are some potential conversation paths for your one-on-one conversations that draw on what the University of Florida Center for Public Interest Communications learned through communication projects on vaccine hesitancy.

*If they say...*

## “My choice is my business, and no one has a right to know.”

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“Yes, it is important that medical issues are kept private for those like you who want it that way.”</p> <p>“Choosing to get a vaccine certainly is a personal choice. I chose to get it because I read the science and believe it will allow us to get back to normal and hang out with my family again without fear.”</p>	<p>“Would you be interested in a more private way to get your vaccine?”</p> <p>“Would you like to know more about the vaccine and how to find a place to receive the inoculation? I am happy to share what I know.”</p>	<p>“Lots of people have chosen to get the vaccine. It was the right choice for them. If you are interested there are ways you can privately access the vaccine. Your doctor’s office could be a good place to ask about that option.”</p>

**“I’ve already had COVID-19, and so I am already immune.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“I am sorry to hear that. What was your experience with it like? Any lasting effects?”</p>	<p>“Have you seen new studies showing that immunity from having COVID-19 only lasts for months? These studies show people can get it again. Studies also show that the protections by vaccination last much longer, and if a booster is needed, health officials are making plans for how to facilitate those doses.”</p>	<p>“Other workers who have had COVID-19 decided to get a vaccine to protect themselves from that happening again. And good news from some of the new research is that those who had the disease AND got vaccinated are even more protected than those who just received the vaccine.”</p>

**“The vaccine just appeared so quickly. It doesn’t seem like they had enough time to test it.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“It was fast. It’s kind of amazing that we live in this historic moment where things like this are possible and the vaccines became available as quickly as they did. The existing vaccine and other science available—and the whole world working on it—certainly helped us create this effective vaccine quickly.”</p>	<p>“Have you seen the reports that scientists are now applying mRNA technology, like Pfizer’s vaccine, to inoculating against other diseases like AIDS and the flu? Or that we’ve been using vector-based vaccines, like Johnson and Johnson’s, for years to protect against a range of diseases?”</p>	<p>“Do you know that you can talk to our health clinic or your doctor about COVID-19 vaccines? They have office hours, or you can send them an email. Talking to an expert might help you get your question answered.”</p>

### “Putting a foreign substance in my body just doesn’t seem natural.”

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“I can see how it could feel weird to put a new vaccine into your arm. It can be scary. When I think about it, I don’t always know what’s in all the medicine I take, but I trust the science and the millions of medical professionals who have taken it and inoculated their families.”</p>	<p>“Did you know the vaccine is actually built off of other vaccines that have been around for a long time that naturally build up our antibodies to protect us if we ever come face to face with COVID-19?”</p>	<p>“Vaccines will greatly increase your chances of not getting a case of COVID-19. The virus can do long-term damage to your body. Have you heard of the cases of people with long-haul COVID-19?”</p>

### “I don’t want to be a guinea pig.”

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“Yes, that is understandable; I don’t want to be either, but now that more than 168 million people in the U.S. have received the vaccine safely and we can see that it is effective, I am excited to get the vaccine.”</p> <p>“The U.S. FDA grants Emergency Use Authorization after review of rigorous testing. Not only does the FDA grant the initial authorization, but the FDA and CDC share the responsibility of actively monitoring how the medicine works for nearly everyone.”</p>	<p>“For decades, America has made what it needed. We made these vaccines to help us make a better America in which we can all live free from fear and return to the things that matter most.”</p> <p>“Did you know nearly XXXX many people in our town/county/state have already taken the vaccine? This is working in/for our community.”</p>	<p>“The vaccines may seem like they were developed quickly, but they were built off of existing vaccine ingredients and technologies that have already been through rigorous clinical trials.”</p>

**“I’m worried about side effects, or that getting the vaccine will be worse than getting COVID-19.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“Yes, some people do experience side effects from COVID-19 vaccines. They might range from nothing to temporary symptoms that are like the flu. But, you have had the flu before and you were able to get through that. This, at worst, may be one or two days of that.”</p> <p>“The side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine, whether they are mild or not, show that your body is practicing fighting infection by building up antibodies to prevent serious illness from COVID-19 in the future. You feel sick for a day or two, but it’s worth it to have peace of mind after!”</p>	<p>“I made a plan to deal with my side effects. I made sure to have Tylenol and childcare ready if I needed it. May I help you develop a plan for dealing with side effects that you might experience?”</p> <p>“Yes, for some folks the side effects from the vaccine do make people ill for a day or two. But could you imagine how much time it would take to recover from COVID-19, particularly if you had to be hospitalized? Who might care for your family then?”</p>	<p>“Most people have mild side effects, such as a headache, a sore arm or feeling really tired. Having a plan for how to deal with them could be useful.”</p> <p>“You’re someone who considers evidence and makes the best decisions for yourself and those you love. You might feel sick for a few days, but then you will get to feel relief knowing you can be with your friends, family, and coworkers again safely.”</p>

**“I’m going to wait and see.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“I can understand that. There is a lot of uncertainty right now. While the vaccine is approved for ‘emergency use,’ there is still the same robust science and research behind it as your other medicines.”</p>	<p>“You know how government and bureaucracies love paperwork and take forever to do things? There are a lot of people working together to do that process very quickly to save lives with this vaccine.”</p>	<p>“Moderna, one of the vaccine makers, is applying for full approval right now. The others aren’t far behind, and every day more research shows the effectiveness of the vaccine. Can I show you how you can protect yourself?”</p>

**“I’m worried that getting the COVID-19 vaccine will make it hard to get pregnant or hurt my child.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“I know that making the right decision to protect you and your future child is important to you. Mothers who have chosen to get the vaccine have found that it protects them and even their new babies.”</p>	<p>“Have you seen the recent studies that show that women who are pregnant are at higher risk for complications if they get COVID-19?”</p> <p>“Have you seen the studies that show the vaccine poses no risk to women who are pregnant, wanting to be pregnant or breastfeeding? In fact, they even found benefits to the baby. Babies whose mothers were vaccinated are born with the antibodies to protect them from COVID-19.”</p>	<p>“You could talk to your doctor about any concerns you may have.”</p>

**“I don’t know who to trust for information. The media and government seem to be blowing this out of proportion.”**

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
<p>“Yeah, finding information you can trust can be hard these days. It seems the politicians and cable news just want to shout each other down and win either power or ratings.”</p>	<p>“What information are you seeking that you are having trouble trusting? Do you mean in terms of the death toll or the cases of long-haul COVID-19? The benefits of vaccination?”</p>	<p>“I consider who I trust very carefully. I’ve done a lot of reading on this topic, and I trust nonpartisan organizations that I’ve found that stick to the facts—such as the CDC and FDA. Locally, I trust my doctor as well. My doctor also agrees with what the CDC and FDA are saying regarding the safety of the vaccines.”</p>

## “I’m not getting the vaccine unless they make me.”

You might reply...	You could ask...	You might close by saying...
“I hear you; I do not like being told what to do by anyone.”	“I don’t know if it will be mandated—there are a lot of good reasons for and against that directive. But I got it so my friends, family and coworkers can feel safe around me.”	“We have now seen that the vaccines are showing significant positive outcomes with very few side effects. Here’s some information on the importance of vaccines. Thank you so much for considering the vaccination.”

### Some other things to keep in mind as you hold these one-on-one conversations:

- Listen and acknowledge you heard their perspective.
- Acknowledge that public health officials have made mistakes—in this pandemic and previous medical interventions with many communities (e.g., discriminatory practices of under-represented groups).
- Be transparent about what you do and don’t know. Offer to share sources related to questions they have that you can’t answer.
- While it’s important to listen compassionately to people’s concerns, do not repeat misinformation. Pivot to positive examples quickly, before they can repeat themselves. If they cite one sad story, acknowledge the sad story and also cite positive ones that are equally compelling.
- Stay calm and do not react to defensiveness. If someone is defensive, it means they think you are talking down to them. Tell them you did not mean to offend them and that you do not mean any disrespect.
- Show your respect for their perspective and expertise. Avoid being patronizing, judgmental or condescending. No finger wagging.
- If you know this person well, connect getting the vaccines to their personal goals (e.g. going on a trip, having a big family dinner) or their identity (e.g. as someone who considers evidence in their decision making, a parent making commonsense decisions for their kids, or someone who wants to make their own health decisions).

For more resources, visit  
[themanufacturinginstitute.org/research/thisisourshot](https://themanufacturinginstitute.org/research/thisisourshot)

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