



Society for HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

HELPING PATIENTS OVERCOME VACCINE HESITANCY

Survey results indicate that some patients are hesitant to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Whether it's due to the spread of misinformation on social media or the misunderstanding of the vaccine production process, vaccine hesitancy can lead to difficult conversations with patients. When faced with vaccine hesitancy in the practice, remember these evidence based strategies:

- 🌀 **Discuss the COVID vaccine like you would any other:** "When would you like to schedule your vaccine?"
- 🌀 **If patient is reluctant, start with an empathic and/or normalizing statement:** "I understand....," "These decisions are hard," or "A lot of people are unsure what to do."
- 🌀 **Elicit the concern:** "What worries you?" "What have you heard or read that made you feel the vaccine isn't for you." or "Tell me more about what you see as the pros and cons."
- 🌀 **Listen:** Use active listening to help patient feel heard: "I get it," "um hmm," or "It's a challenge."
- 🌀 **Normalize:** Be clear that the patient is not alone in their worries.
- 🌀 **When there is misinformation, ask permission to offer clarifying information and engage patient in a non-judgmental way:** "Is it ok if we take a moment for me to share how I understand the evidence to help you in making your decision? It's important to me that my patients have all of the information they need to make a choice that is right for them."
- 🌀 **Don't push – pushing can engender push back:** "I can tell you're not so sure. Can I give you some information you can look at later?" or "I want to help you make the decision right for you, is there more I can share to help?"
- 🌀 **Discuss the process to allay concerns about development timeline and lack of long-term data:** "Some people feel uncomfortable because the vaccines were developed quickly. The good news is that doctors had been exploring this area for a long time. They started the research process, knowing something like this could happen, many years ago."
- 🌀 **Evoke the trust of your relationship – remind them you are an advisor:** "We've had to make other decisions together, and I hope that you feel I've steered you well in the past. My goal is to keep you healthy."
- 🌀 **Avoid fear mongering, focus on the benefits to you and others:** "Getting vaccinated helps protect you and those you care about; it is amazing that all of vaccines available to us seem to prevent almost all severe illness, hospitalizations and most importantly, death. They are an important tool to help us get closer to normal."

Set your expectations. When you get push back or feel frustrated, it's time to pull back & play the long game.

EXAMPLE QUICK STATEMENT TO RESPOND TO RELUCTANCE/ANXIETY

"I understand why you feel unsure about getting the COVID vaccine, and you want to keep your family and you safe. I will respect whatever choice you make, even if it is different from my own. To help in making your choice, I read about what the doctors have done. While it's new, it went through the same hoops as other medications I give you, and I can assure you it is safe, and it works. I believe this vaccine is important for your health."

For other quick evidence-based statements (and helpful patient handouts), see the Society of Behavioral Medicine's ["Helpful Resources for Primary Care Teams."](#)

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