

Vaccine Hesitancy: Lessons from Motivational Interviewing



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Trust

How do we build (or re-build)
trust in a busy setting with
limited time?

“Motivational interviewing is a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person’s own motivation and commitment to change.”

-Miller & Rollnick, 2013

Think about a health care interaction you had that was **not** positive.

How would you describe this provider?

Example #1: Correcting & Convincing

Practitioner: With your daughter being just over six months old, she's due for several vaccines at this appointment - DTaP, which protects against several illnesses, Pneumococcal, and the COVID vaccine.

Caregiver: I'm okay with the first two, but we'll pass on the COVID vaccine. Those shots were so rushed, and I'm just not sure if it's safe.

Practitioner: Oh, it's perfectly safe. There was actually a lot of testing that happened to make sure it's safe. And getting this vaccine will help protect others in your family and the community.

Caregiver: But the rates are so low right now that it doesn't seem like a big deal. And what if it hurts her health down the road? They could find something out in a few years. I read that it could even affect her ability to have kids in the future.

Practitioner: There's actually nothing to that. And I've seen some kids get really sick from COVID, and that could affect her health for the long-term. Aren't you worried about that?

Caregiver: Of course, I want my daughter to be healthy! I just don't know if this is the right thing to do.

In Motivational Interviewing, we avoid:

Debating

Judging

Cajoling

Guilt-tripping

Dumping information

Pressuring

Pouncing

Confronting

Think about a health care provider that you really like and trust.

What characteristics does this provider have?

Example #2: Listening

Practitioner: With your daughter being just over six months old, she's due for several vaccines at this appointment - DTaP, which protects against several illnesses, Pneumococcal, and the COVID vaccine.

Caregiver: I'm okay with the first two, but we'll pass on the COVID vaccine. Those shots were so rushed, and I'm just not sure if it's safe.

Practitioner: You've got some hesitations. (Reflection)

Caregiver: Yeah, and it just seems unnecessary too. The rates are so low right now and it doesn't seem worth the risk. But everyone is pushing these shots.

Practitioner: You want to do what's best for her. And you definitely want her to get the DTaP and Pneumococcal shots. (Reflection)

Caregiver: Right. I don't want her to get sick, but I'm not convinced that giving her COVID shot is the right thing to do. It's hard to know who to believe.

Practitioner: You're trying to sort through all of the information – and there's a lot! (Reflection) I'm wondering – is there anything you'd like to know about COVID or the vaccine that I could help answer? (Question)

In Motivational Interviewing, we aim to:

- Listen, listen, listen
- Show openness, respect, and understanding
- Offer information *with permission*

Example #2: Listening (Continued)

Practitioner: Is there anything you'd like to know about COVID or the vaccine that I could help answer? (Question)

Caregiver: Well . . . have you actually seen a child get really sick with COVID?

Practitioner: I have, and I have a few patients who got sick and are still really struggling.

Caregiver: Really? Like, how?

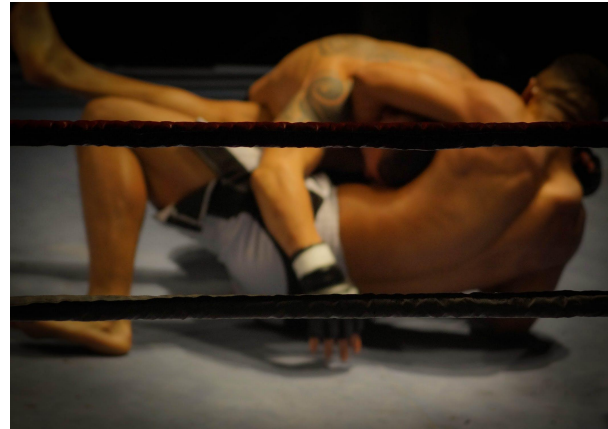
Practitioner: I have a few young patients who were hospitalized, and several others who weren't in the hospital, but they had COVID and still have symptoms months later – especially with breathing, and they now have trouble playing sports that they really love. What do you make of that?

Caregiver: Well, it sounds like it can be bad, but . . . It still seems like it's not that common.

Practitioner: You're wondering how risky this really is. (Reflection)

Caregiver: Yes, and I don't want anyone pushing me to get this for my daughter.

Dancing not Wrestling



Example #2: Listening (Continued)

Practitioner: This really is up to you. (Emphasize autonomy) If I could sum up what you've told me – it sounds like you really want your daughter to be healthy, and you certainly don't want her to get COVID. You definitely want her to get the other recommended vaccines. You've been doing some research on COVID and want to make the decision that's best for her. (Summarize) Does that all sound right?

Caregiver: Yes, that's right.

Practitioner: How are you feeling about it now? You're welcome to think about it more, or if you'd like her to get the COVID vaccine today along with the others, we can do that.

Caregiver: Well, thank you. I won't get that one for her now, but I'll think about it.

Practitioner: Sounds good. We'll go ahead with the first two vaccines, and if it's okay with you, I'll check in with you during the next visit to see how you're feeling about the COVID vaccine and if any other questions have come up that I can help with.

Caregiver: Sure, that'd be fine.

A primary goal in MI:

Behave in a way that will
reduce resistance and
evoke change talk

Traditional Approach



- Authoritarian
- Confrontational
- Educational

Some notes on the “Presumptive” Approach

- Study most commonly cited is pre-COVID (Opel 2015)
- Variety of styles categorized as “presumptive”
- Study population is 89% female, 81% white, upper-middle class, 26% discussing vaccines for the first time



Directing

“Presumptive”

“Announcement”

Guiding

**Motivational
Interviewing**

Following

“Participatory”

“Conversational”



Directing

“We’ll give her the flu shot today.”

Guiding

“She’s due for the flu shot today. Do you have any questions about it?”

Following

“Do you want her to get the flu shot today?”

In Breakout Groups, please discuss:

- Where do you tend to fall on the directing/guiding/following continuum? What have you seen in practice?
- How effective do your conversations currently feel? How effective do you feel the conversations are that you observe?
- Please choose a spokesperson to share out

How does this fit into vaccine conversations?

Adjust your approach based on what you already know about the person.

If you know nothing, use this formula:

Give information (neutrally) and ask if they have questions.

Acceptor

Start here if you're unsure of their stance.

Give information + ask question

Hesitant

Soften approach.

Give information + ask question

Decliner

Tread carefully. Invite dialogue.

Emphasize autonomy, ask permission

Acceptor

I recommend you get ____.
What questions do you have?

Hesitant

At this appointment, I
recommend _____. What are your
thoughts?

Decliner

Would it be okay if we talked
about the __ vaccine? The
decision is up to you.

Core MI Skills

Open-ended questions

Affirmations

Reflections

Summaries

Questions*

*be careful with
“why” questions

What are your thoughts on the vaccine?

How do you feel about the vaccine?

Where do you like to go for information about the vaccine?

Affirmations

You really care about your children.

You're the kind of person who thinks things through.

I appreciate how you're open to learning as much as you can about this.

Reflections

You want to get clear on the facts.

You don't want to take risks with your health.

On one hand you have some concerns about the vaccine, and on the other you don't want to get COVID.

Autonomy- Emphasizing Statements

This really is up to you.

No one can make you do this
– you're the decision-maker.

I respect whatever decision
you make.

Explore - Offer - Explore

A Format For Providing Information

Explore-Offer-Explore

- **Explore** what they already know about the topic
 - [Ask permission to share your perspective]
- **Offer** information in a brief, neutral manner
- **Explore** what they think about what you've shared

Explore- Offer - Explore

- I've heard the COVID-19 vaccine doesn't even work that well anymore.
 - [Reflect/Explore] You wonder how much it would protect you. What have you been hearing about how it currently works?
 - [Ask permission] Could I share a bit about the latest research on the vaccine?
 - [Offer] We're still finding that people who receive the most recent booster have a lower risk of hospitalization, and a lower risk of long COVID, which can hit people really hard. I do also want to say that this is entirely your decision.
 - [Explore] How do you feel about that?

Explore - Offer - Explore

- I think my child is too young to need the HPV shot.
 - [Reflect/Explore] You're not sure she needs it. What have you heard about the the HPV shot?
 - [Ask permission] Could I share a bit about why we recommend it at this age?
 - [Offer] Vaccines work best if they're received well before someone could be exposed, and this one is very effective at preventing several types of cancers down the road. They can get the vaccine when they're older, but then she would need three shots instead of only two if she starts now.
 - [Explore/Emphasize Autonomy] Does that information help? We do recommend it at this visit for the greatest protection, and you are of course welcome to think more about it.

Meet Doctor Gagneur

- Piloted a Motivational Interviewing Approach in Maternity Wards in Quebec
- 15% increased intent to vaccinate
- 7% increased vaccination rates at seven months
- 9% increase in complete immunization by age 2 years
- Quebec has begun hiring vaccine counselors in maternity wards across the province

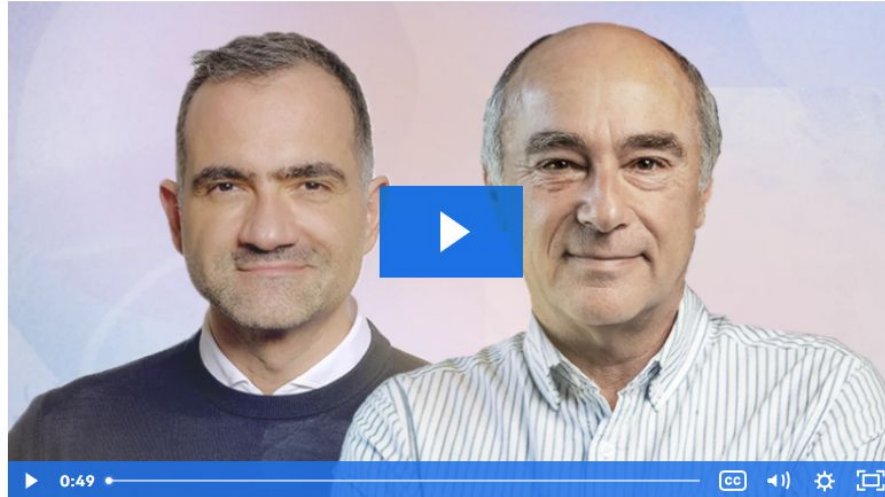
“Once we were done, he told me that, whether I chose to vaccinate or not, he respected my decision as someone who wanted the best for my kids,” she remembered. “Just that sentence — to me, it was worth all the gold in the world.”

- Marie-Hélène Étienne-Rousseau, caregiver, after a conversation with Dr. Arnaud Gagneur, neonatologist

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Free course from Psychwire

Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy



🕒 2 hrs | Self Directed Short Course 📌 For Medical and Health Professionals

Want to Learn More?

- Boost Oregon now offers Motivational Interviewing training
 - Free 1-hour Monthly Sessions
 - 4-6 hour Introductory Training
 - 12-14 hour Comprehensive Training
 - MI Skills Development with Individual Feedback
 - 3-6 months of Organizational MI Support

- Learn more at:

<https://www.boostoregon.org/motivational-interviewing>

Resources

[The Vaccine Whisperers: Counselors gently engage new parents before their doubts harden into certainty](#)

[Talking with Patients about COVID-19 Vaccination](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[The Science of Reasoning with Unreasonable People](#) – NY Times piece by Adam Grant