How to Talk to Unvaccinated Friends and Family

By Vaccinate Your Family

Even if you're fully vaccinated, it's likely you know someone who is not. There are a lot of reasons why people might opt out of vaccines — from disinformation to unanswered questions to bad experiences with the medical system. It can feel frustrating or scary when someone you care about chooses not to vaccinate and to leave themselves vulnerable to getting seriously sick. Emotions can run high. But **talking with loved ones about vaccines doesn't have to lead to a fight.** Researchers have uncovered some strategies that can help you navigate these conversations.

You can build confidence in vaccines, one person, one conversation at a time. Here's how.

1. Don't go into the conversation with the goal of convincing them.

The choice to get vaccinated (or not) is ultimately theirs to make, and pressuring them could backfire or hurt your relationship. Instead, your objective should be to listen and, if they're cool with it, share information so that the data they're using to make their decision is as complete and accurate as possible.

2. Ask questions.

If they offer up that they don't want to get vaccinated, ask "may I ask why?" If they share a piece of misinformation, ask "may I ask where you heard that?" or, "Would you mind sending that to me so I can read it too?" Don't assume you know why they haven't gotten the vaccine yet. Ask questions, listen to their answers, and try to understand where they're coming from.

3. Find common ground early and often.

You can say, "I had that same concern" or, "Yeah, that would have freaked me out too." Pointing out what you have in common can remind them you're on the same side. You care about each other. You both want each other to be healthy and safe.

4. Get permission before you share info.

Nobody likes to feel talked down to. Asking if it's OK to share what you know/have read/learned acknowledges their autonomy and that they're equal partners in the conversation.

Have you read:

- They're unvaccinated. So is your immunocompromised child. What do you do?
- From Avoiding Vaccines to Getting A Child Caught Up: Where To Start?
- 12 Years Ago I Stopped Vaccinating My Children. Then I Changed My Mind.

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5. When you do share the science, be transparent about where it comes from, and what it says and doesn't say.

Trust is absolutely crucial in these conversations. So don't hurt the trust you have with them by exaggerating the benefits of the vaccine or downplaying the risks. It's OK to say what we're still learning.

6. Share your experience.

What information resonated with you? Why did you decide to vaccinate? How did you react to the vaccine? What benefits do you feel you've gained? These experiences can be way more impactful than statistics or scientific facts.

7. Focus on the positive.

What could they gain by vaccinating? Sometimes people focus so much on the risks of the vaccine that they forget to consider the benefits of the vaccine — or the risks of *not* vaccinating. A lot of people respond well to messages that remind them that getting vaccinated can help protect others in their life (especially people who can't get vaccinated themselves due to their age or for medical reasons), and that getting vaccinated can help protect them from being hospitalized or dying due to COVID. Who in their life needs them to stay healthy?

8. Help them overcome barriers.

It's not easy for everyone to get vaccinated. Some worry about missing work. Others worry about childcare. Some might not know where to go or fear they'll be turned away. Ask questions to find out if there are barriers. And if there's something you can do to help make it easier — watching their child, covering their shift, giving them a ride, etc. — offer it.

9. Leave the door open for continued conversation.

Some people aren't ready to engage, or they still have questions or doubts. That's OK. Let them know that you're there and that you care about them. People can (and do) change their minds. If you haven't talked about it in a while, gently check-in.

10. Be a resource for vaccine info.

If your friends and family know you keep up on vaccine-related news, they might be more likely to reach out to you with questions. An easy way to do this is to share science-based resources on social media. Some great science-based resources include:

- Vaccinate Your Family
- The University of Minnesota
- The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Voices for Vaccines