



Guiding Conversations About COVID-19 Vaccines for Young Children

COVID-19 vaccines are now recommended for children ages 6 months and older. The vaccines are safe, effective, and free. Some families will get their children vaccinated immediately. Others may be unsure about whether to vaccinate their child or have concerns about the safety or side effects of the vaccine. Explore strategies below for communicating with families about the COVID-19 vaccine for their young child. Read a sample conversation between a teacher and a parent to see these practices in action.



Getting Started

Keep in mind that you may have your own thoughts, feelings, and questions about the vaccines. This conversation is focused on the family's needs. The goal is to help families get accurate information and feel comfortable discussing concerns, not to change their mind.

Start by asking, "Our program is sharing the latest guidance on vaccine safety and effectiveness. Would it be OK if we talk through some resources and information I have?"

Understand Concerns and Questions

If you have permission, you might say, "Nearly everyone has heard something about the vaccines. What are your thoughts, questions, and feelings about COVID-19 vaccines for young children?"

If the family member expresses concerns or uncertainty, you could ask, "Would you like to discuss your concerns?" or "Do you have any questions?"

Family engagement focuses on building relationships with the key family members in a child's life. It is a collaborative process that should be sensitive to the family's culture and language. Family engagement requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths of family members and staff.

Use Relationship-based Engagement, Reflective Listening, and Summarizing Strategies

Use skills that have successfully engaged families before and practice reflective listening. For example, when a family says, "I'm not sure I've heard very much about the vaccines for children," you could say, "It sounds like you don't have a lot of information about the vaccines yet."

Make sure families feel heard and respected. By taking time to listen to a family's perspective and answer their questions, you can help them make the best decision for their children.

Summarizing can also be helpful. Make sure you're on the right track by saying something like, "Is this what you mean? ..." or "I think I heard you saying ..."



Leave Room for Future Communication

End the conversation on a hopeful note, such as “I really appreciate you sharing your thoughts with me.”

Ask for permission to follow up and talk again to keep the conversation going. Say, “I hope we can meet again to see what you think after reflecting on our conversation or after reading more information,” or “More information will be available about the vaccine. Can we keep sharing?”

Offer Correct Information

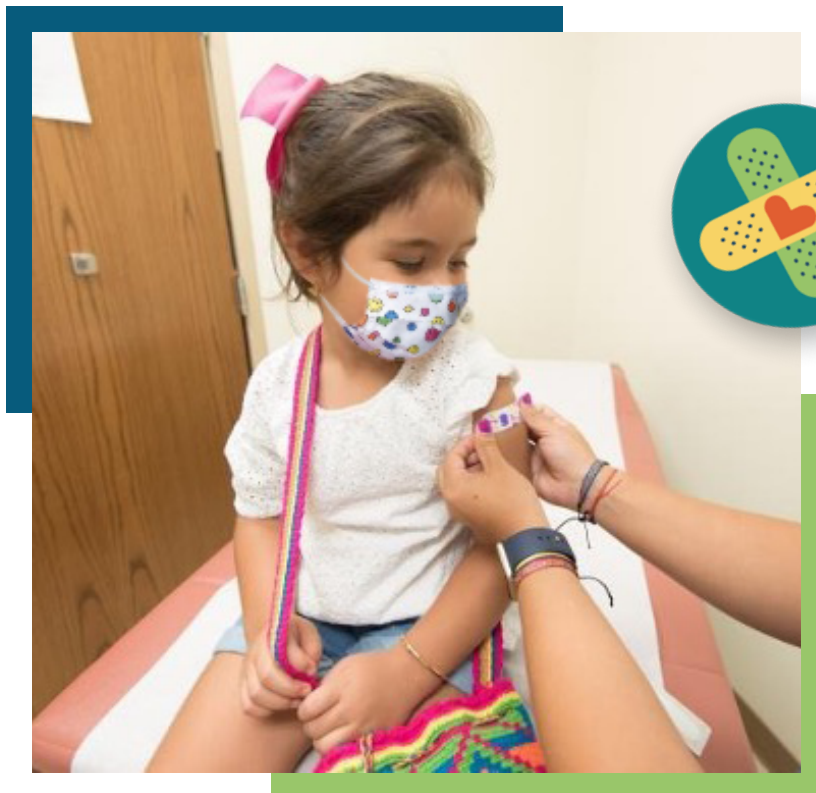
It is not your role to give medical advice, but you can encourage families to speak with their child’s trusted health care provider. Suggest writing down questions in advance.

Offer guidance about the vaccines from reliable sources. For example:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information in Chinese, English, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese at [COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Teens](#).
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides resources for families in many languages as part of its [We Can Do This](#) campaign.
- The Office of Head Start and National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety developed the [COVID-19 Vaccines for Young Children](#) fact sheet.
- Your tribal, state, territorial, or local health department may also have family-friendly materials in languages spoken in your community.

Make clear, evidence-based statements such as:

- “Before recommending COVID-19 vaccination for children 6 months and older, the vaccines were studied and shown to be safe for young children.”
- “Health experts continue to monitor the safety of all vaccines.”
- “Your child cannot get COVID-19 from any COVID-19 vaccine.”
- “COVID-19 vaccines are recommended, but right now they aren’t required. It’s every family’s choice.”



Sample Conversation

Monica, an Early Head Start parent, told her 2-year-old's teacher that she has some concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines. When Ms. Stacy sits down with her at the end of the day, Monica says she has heard that the vaccine is now available for her child, Jaden. Monica's mother told her that she should not get Jaden immunized because it has not been studied enough. Monica has spoken to friends and family and received several different messages. Many people have suggested the COVID-19 vaccine is a welcome relief to families with young children. Monica is unsure if the vaccine is helpful or harmful.

Ms. Stacy: Welcome, Monica. I'm glad you mentioned your concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines. I know you told me that you've heard lots of different things about the vaccines for children. Would it be OK if we spent some time discussing this?

Monica: Sure. Some of my family said it's not a good idea to have Jaden vaccinated, but my friend said she already had her baby daughter vaccinated.

Ms. Stacy: It sounds like you are getting lots of different kinds of information. How are you feeling about all of this?

Monica: A little confused. You know I've always been worried about Jaden's health because of his asthma. Both Jaden and I have had other health issues this past year. I don't want to do anything that would hurt him.

Ms. Stacy: Confusion is understandable in this situation. It seems like talk of vaccines can bring up lots of strong feelings for you.

Monica: For sure.

Ms. Stacy: Would it be OK if I shared the information we have about the vaccines?

Monica: I guess so. Yes, I think I would like that.

Ms. Stacy: Thanks. First, it's always best to discuss this with Jaden's pediatrician. Does Jaden still see Dr. Gray?

Monica: Yes. But is the vaccine a good idea?

Ms. Stacy: The vaccines have been studied by many health experts and are safe for children. They can help prevent people from getting very sick or needing to go to the hospital.

Monica: I'm seeing Dr. Gray next week for Jaden's next check-up. I'm still not sure about the vaccine.

Ms. Stacy: I understand that you're not sure. It's OK to feel that way. Can I give you some resources we have about the vaccine? You can read them over when you're ready and ask Dr. Gray any questions you still have. In fact, you can write the questions down before Jaden's appointment if you like.

Monica: Great. That sounds helpful. Thanks.

Ms. Stacy: Monica, I'm so pleased we had a chance to chat today. Is it OK if I follow up with you after you talk with Dr. Gray?

Monica: Sure.



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