

TALKING ABOUT VACCINES IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Your approach to communicating with vaccine hesitant patients and families about getting vaccinations has an influence on their willingness to vaccinate.

Motivational Interviewing¹ is an evidence-based and culturally sensitive way to speak with unvaccinated patients about getting vaccinated. The goal is to help people manage mixed feelings and move toward healthy behavior change, consistent with their values and needs.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is very compatible with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) values. MI has an approach that is patient and respectful and treats each person as an individual.



Here are four steps to apply Motivational Interviewing when discussing vaccination during a patient visit:



1. BE COMPASSIONATE

- Acknowledge, but don't lead with anxiety or fear of vaccines
- Be aware that people may be hesitant to get vaccinated due to the historical trauma Native people have with the government and past harmful treatment from the medical field. Others may not have accurate information of how vaccines work. Ensure transparency about the vaccine and give the patient plenty of time to ask any questions they may have.



2. ASK PERMISSION TO DISCUSS VACCINES

- "If it's ok with you, I would like to spend a few minutes talking with you about [Insert vaccine]".
- If the patient says no:
 - Option 1: Move on and say "I respect that, and because I care about your overall health; maybe we could talk about the vaccines at a future time".
 - Option 2: Based on the patient's attitudes, emotion, and your understanding of their worldview, you could spend a few minutes curiously exploring why the patient doesn't want to talk about it.
 - Remember, the goal is to understand. These conversations take time and may continue over multiple visits.



3. MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IDEAS AND ADVICE

- Ask open ended questions:
 - What have you heard about this vaccine?
 - Could you tell me more about why you feel that way?
- Ask a scaled question:
 - Example: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to get this vaccine?"

- Follow up: Ask why they choose that number and what would help them move to a higher number.
- Your goal is to help the patient become more open to moving toward higher numbers.
- Express empathy — It is important to show support for the patient to incorporate their personal values and the health needs of their family and community as they make their decision.
- People hesitant about vaccines usually have more practice explaining why they haven't gotten vaccinated, so it's good to reverse that. Ask them to express their vaccination benefits out loud.
- End the conversation by giving a strong recommendation and ensure you are open for talking again if they would like to, or have any questions.



4. RESPOND TO QUESTIONS ABOUT VACCINES

- If a patient asks a question about vaccine safety, vaccine risks, or their health or mental health, respond within the boundaries of your competence, ethics, and scope of practice.
- Be honest and open. Provide scientific information as needed.

Respecting Traditional Communication in Native American Communities²

Awareness of communication styles within American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities can enhance cultural competence. Although AI/AN tribes are culturally unique and diverse, these general suggestions will help you communicate effectively and respectfully.

Listening is an important skill. Allow patients to teach you about where they come from and how traditional they may be in their communication approach.



- Talk so that you can be understood.
- Don't "talk down" or be condescending.
- Try not to interrupt. Wait to be sure that the person is finished talking before you begin to speak.
- Encourage vaccination as a way to value strength and resilience for their community.
- Share how healthy living is connected to choices. Staying healthy will make it possible to take care of others, such as children and elders, or otherwise fulfill one's role within the community.
- Understand that some AI/AN individuals may choose to consult a family member, elder, or medicine person before making decisions.

Adapted from CDC's *Talking with Patients about COVID-19 Vaccination: An Introduction to Motivational Interviewing for Healthcare Professionals*: cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/engaging-patients.html

¹ CDC, *Talking with Patients about Vaccinating*: cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/engaging-patients.html

² HealthCare Partnership (HCP). (2018). *Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification for Native Communities*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona, Arizona Board of Regents.

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