

# TIPS FOR INITIATING A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE

You don't know for certain, but you suspect a friend or family member is hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Or, you know beyond a shadow of doubt, but you feel like you owe it to them to encourage them to get the vaccine. Here are some tips for diving in.

## **BEGIN FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY AND RESPECT.**

Maybe you don't know how the conversation is going to go, and this makes you uneasy. Rather than taking a judgmental approach to the conversation, go in with genuine curiosity, empathy, and respect. Respect and vulnerability typically encourage mutual respect and shared vulnerability. Respect the other person's point of view and expect them to respect yours.

## **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU'RE HEARING, NOT ON WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.**

Don't spend too much time planning what you're going to say. Tough conversations rarely go as planned, and anyway, maybe you'll be surprised, and the conversation won't be difficult. Focus on listening, reflecting, and observing. Ask neutral, supportive questions: "I see our county is still in the red zone. Do you find this concerning? I know I do." Then listen. Pause. Be interested and engaged. Gather as much detail as possible. Ask follow-up questions without judgment. Your attention and neutrality will encourage others to elaborate.

## **ASK PERMISSION TO SHARE INFORMATION.**

Once you understand your friend's or family member's question or concern, ask if you can provide some information and tell them where you get information you trust. If they agree, they will be more willing to listen to you instead of feeling like you're pushing unwanted information on them. Sometimes, sharing quick, accurate answers to common concerns your family or friends might have can go a long way toward moving someone from worry to confidence. If you don't know the answer to their questions, consider offering to help look for information.

## **SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE.**

Be prepared to answer if you're asked if you've been vaccinated, if you were nervous about getting the vaccine, if you felt bad for a day or two after taking the vaccine, whether you would have a child vaccinated when doses for the 5-11 age range are approved, etc. Talking with others honestly and with respect is mutually rewarding.

## **HELP THEM FIND THEIR OWN REASON TO GET VACCINATED.**

Everyone who chooses to get vaccinated does it for a reason – to protect their family, to protect their children, to be less anxious, to visit their parents, or to get back to activities like seeing friends, resuming work, or returning to school. After addressing concerns with empathy and facts, you can steer the conversation from "why not" to the important reasons that matter to them – their "why." You may choose to share your reasons for getting vaccinated or discuss common goals you may have, like visiting with each other safely. The reasons someone may choose to get vaccinated will always be those that are most compelling to them personally.

## **DON'T PUT IT OFF.**

If your response to conflict is ordinarily not to confront it – not much in life is worth arguing about or losing a friendship over – the global pandemic introduces reason to avoid putting off the conversation. Talking about it now can lead to a commitment to get vaccinated or to think ahead to the permission that an adult or guardian will need to make on behalf of a child or youth aged 17 or younger. Plan the general outline of what you want to convey and the outcome you desire. Then, have the conversation and plan to move on.

## **EXPECT A POSITIVE OUTCOME.**

Rather than filling yourself with dread and telling yourself, "This is going to be a disaster," or "She's never going to speak to me again," tell yourself the conversation will result in an improved relationship. Consider going into the discussion by saying something along the lines of, "We've known each other for years, and something I've always appreciated about you is how comfortable I feel saying anything to you that's on my mind. Got a few minutes to share what your thoughts are about taking the vaccine?"

## **IF THE CONVERSATION GOES WELL, ENCOURAGE ACTION.**

Taking at least one step toward getting vaccinated can help increase the likelihood that someone will follow through. Offer to assist in setting an appointment to get vaccinated. Pick a nearby date in the future to follow up if they are not ready to make the appointment. If possible and desired, accompany them to the vaccination appointment.

**MORE INFORMATION:** [How to talk about COVID-19 vaccines with friends and family | CDC](#)