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About This Booklet

This is a job aid for health providers and others who work in health clinics to build skills in COVID-19 vaccine counseling.

People trust you.
You have a critical role in COVID-19 vaccination.
For people still undecided about vaccination, a personal conversation and recommendation from their health provider is incredibly powerful. There is no substitute. People who are still undecided about whether to get the vaccine have heard lots of information about COVID-19 vaccination from their friends, family, social media, and even government officials. It is really hard for people to know who to listen to when there is too much conflicting information all around them. Talking to a trusted health provider is the best opportunity to cut through all of that confusing noise and get a clear recommendation for vaccination.

But we haven’t all been trained in vaccine counseling.
Counseling to build trust in vaccination involves a set of specific skills and techniques anyone can learn. Everyone can use these skills whatever their role or job description. People come in with difficult questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine, and it can take a lot of time to answer them. Sometimes it is hard to even know how to answer the questions because they are based in fears and misconceptions that don’t have a basis in science or fact. But those fears and concerns are real and powerful and valid and we need to treat them with respect and care.

How To Use This Booklet
This booklet illustrates evidence-based techniques for COVID-19 vaccination using common client questions and concerns. The techniques illustrated in this booklet are for health providers and other clinic staff—such as front desk staff and med techs—to use in their everyday interactions with clients. The scenarios illustrate how these techniques might play out in a counseling session with clients who come in with common questions and concerns. Of course they are fiction, and very condensed. They are intended to help you imagine what words and phrases you might use in a similar situation. Reading multiple different scenarios reinforces the techniques so they are top-of-mind when you need them.

These scenarios are not designed as a handout or informational material for clients. The clients in these comics repeat common misperceptions and myths. While they are common and everyone has heard them, reading a misperception—even if it is discredited in the same material—can reinforce that misperception in people’s minds.

Want to Learn More?
The techniques illustrated in this booklet come from the Johns Hopkins University’s COVID-19 Vaccine Training Compendium, Module 3 “Building Trust in Vaccination Through Communication”. You can click through the training modules at: www.covid19vaccinetraining.org/training-modules/module-3-trust
LISTEN
Understand underlying concerns and questions

CONVEY EMPATHY
to build trust

FOCUS ON THE DISEASE
Pivot the conversation to the disease itself

DON’T CORRECT MISPERCEPTIONS
Do provide accurate information

END WITH A PLAN or
a clear recommendation for next steps

Look for the techniques in the scenarios!
Each 8-frame scenario shows how a provider might use the 5 counseling techniques.

Many frames have an orange box that shows which counseling technique is being utilized in that frame.
CLIENT CONCERNED ABOUT Vaccine Safety

My next client worries that the vaccine isn't safe and was rushed. Let's see if I can help her out.

Did you? That makes me feel better. But I'm worried it isn't safe.

I can understand your concern! I had questions too before I was vaccinated.

Let's talk about safety. I'll answer all your questions about safety. It's important to remember that COVID-19 is really dangerous.

I don't know anyone who got really sick, though.

That's great. Unfortunately three of my patients died and many more were hospitalized. I don't want that to happen to you.

Convey empathy to build trust.

Listen Understand the patient's underlying concerns.

Pivot to focus on the disease.
But I read there might be magnets or microchips in the vaccines!

Thanks for reminding me - you had questions about safety. Well over half the US population has taken the vaccine. Before that there were months of studies.

I have studied the safety information and I believe the vaccines are safe and effective.

Thanks for helping me. That went well! I’m so glad she trusted me.

You may have noticed she believed a myth about microchips. It was hard not to tell her she’s wrong. But that wouldn’t have helped. Instead, I gave her accurate information.

Don’t argue or debate. Just provide solid information your client can act on now, or later when they are ready.

End with a plan or call to action.

Don’t challenge misperceptions.

Provide accurate information.
CLIENT CONCERNED ABOUT Breakthrough Infection

My next client wonders why he should get the vaccine when breakthrough infection is possible after vaccination.

So you haven't gotten the vaccine yet? Can you tell me more about that?

Right, I just don’t see the point. Vaccinated people are getting Covid anyway. Why bother?

Hearing about breakthrough infections is discouraging, I know. It feels like we've been dealing with Covid for a long time.

Convey empathy

With this new variant I've read you are just as likely to get Covid whether you are vaccinated or not. Someone is making a bundle on pushing this vaccine.

It's never ending! If the vaccine won't finish this thing I'm done, I've got bigger things to worry about.

The new variant is a concern. Let's talk about it.

Don't challenge misperceptions
This new variant spreads very easily, more easily than the previous one. So that means people are more at risk now than they were before. That’s why we see higher rates now.

This variant does infect some vaccinated people. Not many, but some.

The important thing is that vaccinated people who get a breakthrough infection are still protected from death and serious illness.

So regardless I can still get Covid, right?

There is a chance you could get a mild or asymptomatic case after vaccination, yes.

What I want you to avoid is a serious case of Covid, which is very possible while you remain unvaccinated. Covid can be really dangerous.

I do recommend you get the vaccine to keep you safe. Would you like to talk about doing that?

I might get it. I’ll think about it.

Great. Where would you go to get the vaccine? Do you have a preference?

The pharmacy near me has it. I’ll go there.

My client still isn’t quite ready to get vaccinated. But I believe he will think about it, and that is a good step.

Even when someone isn’t ready to be vaccinated, try to end with a plan. Ask them to come back to see you, or talk to a loved one, or give them information to read.

End with a plan or call to action.
CLIENT CONCERNED ABOUT **Side Effects**

My next client has questions about side effects. I'll do my best to reassure her.

Have you had your COVID-19 vaccine yet?

No, I haven't. I'm really not sure I want to.

Oh really? Why is that?

Listen
Understand the patient's underlying concerns

I'm worried about side effects. I've heard there are a lot.

Convey empathy

I understand! Most people feel fine, but some people may have a low fever or muscle pain, especially after the second shot.

After I got my shot my arm felt sore for a day or two.

Well, the vaccine can't give you COVID. If you do have side effects it's because your body is learning how to fight the disease in the future.

But don't worry if you don't have side effects. The vaccine is still working.

What about the Moderna vaccine? I heard it isn't safe...

That doesn't sound too bad. But what if I get really sick?
...in fact I heard that the side effects are worse than getting COVID.

Serious problems are very rare for all of the vaccines. The CDC and FDA have both said that the benefits far outweigh the risks. I’ve followed the issue and I agree.

Don’t challenge misperceptions

But you could get one of the other vaccines available. They are safe for you, too.

Pivot to focus on the disease

I might get the vaccine. I just want to wait and see. We don’t know if there could be long-term side effects, right?

Vaccines rarely cause long-term side effects. These vaccines went through months of testing and have been given to millions of people.

We do know that COVID can have long-term effects, though.

I believe the vaccine is safe and I want you to be protected from this really dangerous disease.

End with a plan or call to action

It’s true I don’t want COVID!

Okay, then can we make a plan to get you vaccinated? I have a list of nearby clinics here.

Yes, I guess so. Let’s do it.

My client’s worries about side effects were standing in the way of vaccination. That’s why I pivoted to talking about COVID itself.

Reminding her that COVID is dangerous and real helped her put vaccine side effects into perspective.

Pivot Focus on the Disease
CLIENT CONCERNED ABOUT Fertility

My next client has questions about whether the vaccine will impact her fertility.

I see that you haven’t yet gotten a COVID vaccine. Do you have any concerns?

I do, actually. I am worried about whether it will impact my hormones or reproductive system.

Listen
Understand the patient’s underlying concerns

Oh, okay! It’s totally understandable to have these questions. Is there something specific that concerns you?

Convey empathy

Yes – it’s the reports of foreign substances in the vaccines. They’ve been making women’s periods disappear.

Let me tell you a little bit about how the vaccines have been tested for safety, because I think that is going to help.

Don’t challenge misperceptions
All the vaccines were tested with tens of thousands of women of reproductive age. There were no impacts on women’s ability to have children. In fact, some women got pregnant during the trials of the vaccines. Now we are so confident that the vaccine is safe that we strongly recommend that pregnant women get the vaccine, too.

The vaccine is so new, though. How can you know it won’t affect me years from now?

What we know for sure is that COVID really can have effects down the road. Vaccine side effects show up quickly and then pass.

I know you are careful with your health. I don’t want you to risk COVID.

I believe the vaccine is safe for you and I highly recommend it.

That’s reassuring to hear.

Great. Would you like to make a plan to get vaccinated? I can give you a list of vaccination sites.

End with a plan or call to action

Pivot to focus on the disease

Listen
Understand the Patient’s Underlying Concerns

It can be tempting not to ask about a client's concerns about the COVID vaccine because counseling takes so much time.

I’m glad I did, though, because I could show her I understand while also reassuring her of the vaccine’s safety.
CLIENT CONCERNED ABOUT Teen Vaccination

My next client isn't sure whether she should get her thirteen year old son vaccinated. It can be a hard decision!

You said you wanted to talk privately after John’s check up. What can I help with?

I wanted to ask about getting John the COVID vaccine. I’m not sure what to do.

I’m so glad you are considering getting him vaccinated! Can you tell me what concerns you?

Listen
Understand the patient’s underlying concerns

It’s the heart problems. I’ve heard young men are getting sick after the shot.

I can understand your concern! Those reports can be scary. I’m a mom too. I get it! It can be hard to sign your kid up for something new!

I can understand your concern! Those reports can be scary. I’m a mom too. I get it! It can be hard to sign your kid up for something new!

Exactly! I’m willing to take a risk myself, but not for him. He’s only 13.

Convey Empathy

And since COVID is gone now and isn’t a risk to kids anyway I'm leaning against getting him vaccinated.

Don’t Challenge Misperceptions

You asked about the heart problems, so let’s start there. A small number of teens and young men have gotten a condition called myocarditis after the shot.
The CDC met to review the data and decide whether the risk of myocarditis outweighs the risk of COVID for teens.

Myocarditis after the shot was really, really rare. And while it sounds scary, most young people who got it just needed to rest to recover fully.

The CDC strongly recommends that teens get vaccinated. The American Academy of Pediatrics also reaffirmed the need for teen vaccination. I believe it’s the right call.

But it doesn’t make sense to me. My son’s risk of getting COVID is tiny. The vaccine risk must be worse.

It’s great that COVID rates are lower. But they may not stay that way. And your son is a teen now—he is probably meeting friends and he’ll go to school in the fall. The vaccine will protect him.

While the risk of getting COVID right now is low, I do worry about what we are discovering about the lingering effects of COVID, even in kids.

Pivot to focus on the disease

It sort of feels like there is no good choice. Either way I’m going to worry!

I hear you! We worry about our kids. I would recommend taking the path that protects against COVID, though.

End with a plan or call to action

Maybe. But I’m just not comfortable with it yet.

Okay! Let’s make a plan to talk again at John’s next appointment, but in the meantime if you have questions please come back in.

My client wanted to do the right thing for her teenage son. It can be really hard to overcome fears.

That’s why I worked to show empathy. When my clients feel that I truly understand their concerns they know they can trust my judgement.

Convey Empathy to Build Trust
My next client is pregnant and wants my help deciding whether to get the vaccine.

Let's talk about COVID vaccination. Do you have questions or concerns?

How can they possibly know if the vaccine is safe for pregnant people?

Listen
Understand the patient’s underlying concerns

When you are pregnant it feels like everything is a risk, doesn’t it?

Convey empathy

But I think I can help you feel better about this decision. I do recommend you get the vaccine.

This vaccine is so new. I don’t want to risk a miscarriage or having the mRNA do something to my baby’s genes.

Don’t challenge misperceptions

Of course you want to be careful. There are a couple of things you want to think about when it comes to risk, though.

Okay, but...
All the vaccines were tested with tens of thousands of women. They have also tracked thousands of women who received the vaccine while pregnant, and there was no increase in anything worrisome for moms or babies.

And the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that all pregnant people get the vaccine.

Provide accurate information

Pivot to focus on the disease

What I worry about is you getting COVID. Pregnant people who get COVID are more likely to end up in intensive care or have a preterm birth.

I know our COVID rates are low, but it's still out there and you and your baby are still unprotected.

Will the vaccine protect my baby, too?

Yes, there is evidence that once you are protected you pass that on to your baby. If you breastfeed you can pass protection on that way, too.

Okay, I guess that is the best choice then.

Great. We don't have the vaccine here, but when you fill your prescription you could get it at the pharmacy if that is convenient.

There is a lot of misinformation about vaccination during pregnancy out there. It can be hard for pregnant people to know what is right.

That's why providing accurate information is so important. Since my client trusts me, she can trust my information.

It's also important that I provided a really clear recommendation that she get vaccinated.

Don't Challenge Misperceptions

Provide Accurate Information
Client Unconcerned at All

My next client thinks that COVID-19 isn’t a risk to him so he sees no reason to be vaccinated.

We are offering COVID-19 vaccination today. Are you ready to get the vaccine?

No, thanks. I don’t need the vaccine.

Can you tell me why you don’t think you need the vaccine?

I don’t pay much attention to Covid rates, but I haven’t gotten it yet even when rates have been high.

Anyway, I am young and healthy. It’s not like I’d die if I got it.

Being healthy is great, but it doesn’t make you immune to COVID. Healthy young people have died, too. And many, many have gotten very sick and been out of work for weeks.

Listen

Understand the patient’s underlying concerns

Pivot

to focus on the disease

COVID rates are going to go up and down. You’ll be at risk until we get everyone vaccinated.
Okay, but I don’t understand why I’d make myself sick for two days just to avoid the risk of getting COVID someday. It doesn’t make sense.

I understand. No one wants to be sick with side effects.

You will probably be sore at the injection site. The kind of side effects that would make you miss work are more common after the second shot.

So will I need to miss work?

If you can plan to have the second shot before a day off that is great. For most people the side effects are mild. Although it doesn’t feel great, the side effects are just your body’s way of building immunity.

I do think getting the vaccine is the right thing for your health. What do you think?

I think you’ve made your case. Okay, let’s get it over with.

Helping someone decide to be vaccinated when they don’t feel COVID is a risk to them is hard.

Not every client will decide they want to be vaccinated. I’ll just keep on using all of my counseling skills every chance I get.

End with a plan or call to action
Credits and Acknowledgements
The techniques illustrated in this booklet come from the Johns Hopkins University’s COVID-19 Vaccine Training Compendium, Module 3 “Building Trust in Vaccination Through Communication” developed by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health International Vaccine Access Center.

www.covid19vaccinetraining.org/training-modules/module-3-trust

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GET VAXXED.
Over 300,000 people in Baltimore have gotten vaccines—SAFELY. Join your neighbors in protecting yourself and others.

**CHOOSE WHAT WORKS FOR YOU ↓**

1. **At Home:** If you cannot leave your home, we’ll come to you! Call 443-984-8650 or visit covax.baltimorecity.gov.

2. **Local Clinic:** Call 443-984-8650 or visit bit.ly/BMOREVAX.

3. **Neighborhood Pharmacy:** Call 443-984-8650 or visit vaccines.gov.

**LEARN MORE →**

You can get a free and accessible ride if you need. Call 410-372-3444 or e-mail covidtransport@mjminnovations.com. Call soon to book your ride.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- **Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19.** This includes Delta and other variants.

- **Even if you had COVID, please get the vaccine.** Without the vaccine, you could get COVID again and get very sick.

- **Are you pregnant?** The vaccine is safe for you and will protect you! When pregnant, you have a higher risk of getting very sick with COVID.

- **You may feel some side effects from the vaccine for a short time.** That shows your body is building protection it needs. COVID can make you feel much worse than the vaccine’s side effects. COVID can also be deadly.

- **Trying to get pregnant?** The vaccine will NOT keep you from getting pregnant.

**QUESTIONS?**

Visit covax.baltimorecity.gov
Email covidvaccine@baltimorecity.gov
Call 443-984-8650
(8:30a–6:30p Mon–Fri, Sat 9a–1p)