5.6: Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy

Although parents use the internet and social media for medical information, they still look to healthcare providers for trusted advice. It is important that health professionals have the knowledge, attitude, and skills to counsel clients who have questions about vaccines. Respectful dialogue between parents and their child’s healthcare provider is crucial to address vaccine hesitancy. Most often, parents express concerns related to vaccine safety and efficacy, and therefore healthcare providers are an important informational resource. It is important to clearly identify the risks and benefits of vaccines.

Growing Your Communication Skills

Effective communication skills can be developed with practice. When learning about the power of one-to-one conversations, you can make use of a number of techniques to strengthen your skills. First, it is important to look within and understand your personal bias. You should have a good sense of population diversity and societal beliefs. Always aim for simplicity and tailor information to match your client’s needs. Use story-telling to make an impact and understand that an emotional perception may be stronger than logic or fact. People may not remember what you said, but they remember what they thought you said.

When Communicating with Parents…

- Be presumptive that their child will be vaccinated.
- Maintain trust. Be non-judgmental.
- Take time to listen. Keep lines of communication open.
- Validate parental concerns and correct misinformation.
- Acknowledge benefits and risks of vaccines in contrast to risk of disease.
• Frame data clearly and positively.
• Use clear language that is relevant to your client’s context.
• Show parents how the stress of vaccination for their baby/child can be lessened.
• Encourage clients to seek credible sources for more information.
• Use every visit as an opportunity to discuss vaccines.

When Communicating with Adults…

• Use every visit as an opportunity to discuss vaccines.
• Include vaccination in adult health education and assessment.
• Be presumptive that the client will be vaccinated.
• Be non-judgmental.
• Listen to your client's concerns.
• Validate concerns and correct misinformation.
• Frame data clearly and positively.
• Acknowledge benefits and risks of vaccines in contrast to risk of disease.
• Use clear language that is relevant to your client’s context.
• Encourage clients to seek credible sources for more information.
• Address waning immunity in diseases more common to adults.
• Assess client risks based on occupation, travel habits, underlying illness, lifestyle, and/or age.
• Acknowledge that vaccines for adults may not prevent the onset of disease but will at least reduce disease severity.