Having Conversations About Vaccines: Part 3 – Tackling Misinformation
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Welcome to Part 3 of our [four-part series on navigating vaccine conversations](#). In this post, we focus on addressing misinformation—one of the most common obstacles to vaccine acceptance. Misinformation includes incorrect or misleading information, whether shared intentionally or unintentionally, and can leave individuals confused and skeptical. During the pandemic, we encountered significant misinformation regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, and this challenge persists today. Many individuals may cite misinformation as a reason for vaccine hesitancy, making it difficult to know how best to respond.

When faced with a staff member, resident, or family member citing misinformation, here are some tips for responding effectively:

1. Listen with Empathy

- Stay calm and listen without judgment.

- Remember, they are searching for answers to something that's frightening or confusing.

- Often, their decision may seem reasonable if they believe the misinformation is accurate.

  o For example, if someone believes the vaccine is unsafe, it's understandable why they might decline it.

- Share that you, too, have struggled with trusting certain sources of information.

  o For example, say, "I also find it challenging to identify trustworthy information. But I'm concerned that some people try to scare us or mislead us. Let's work together to sort through this."

- Acknowledge that it's okay not to have all the answers.

  o Try, "I don't know everything, but I'd like to find the information together with you."

2. Ask Open-Ended Questions

- Engage with open-ended questions to learn more about their concerns without repeating misinformation, as repeating it can inadvertently reinforce it.

  o For example: "I understand you have concerns about vaccine safety. Let's explore that further. What have you heard?"

3. Point to Credible Sources

- Gauge their openness to alternative information before sharing resources.

- Explain why you trust certain sources, emphasizing that reputable organizations like the CDC exist to serve the public, not for profit.

- Empathize with their difficulty in finding reliable information and clarify why you trust the source you are sharing.

- Remind them that expertise in one area doesn't imply expertise in all topics.

4. Avoid Blame or Shame

- Avoid arguments or condescending language. Be gentle in your responses, maintaining a tone that fosters open communication.

5. Use Inclusive Language and Invite Questions

- Words like "our community" and "we all" help create unity. Use inclusive phrases such as "I understand," "I've been confused too," "our facility," and "our residents."

- Encourage ongoing questions so they feel valued and supported in their search for accurate information.

6. Be Patient

- Correcting misinformation is a gradual process requiring patience. It often takes several conversations to build trust and make these discussions productive. Attempting to correct all misconceptions at once can backfire.

- Practice "empathetic persistence"—a patient approach that allows you to demonstrate genuine concern over time.

Additional Resources:

Many of these tips are drawn from trusted sources, including:

- The **CDC's strategies on addressing COVID-19 vaccine misinformation**, which can apply to any vaccine or infection control conversation.

- The **U.S. Surgeon General's Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation**, offering practices for community-level conversations (see page 16).

For more information, visit the #GetVaccinated website and explore the Risk Less, Do More campaign, which provides tools and resources to help address misinformation and promote vaccine acceptance.

In our final post, we'll cover additional resources and takeaways to keep the conversation going. Join us as we explore helpful tools and approaches to build trust and improve vaccine communication with residents, family members, and staff.