



# Researchers Explore How Vaccine Beliefs Are Formed

Discussion > Advanced 8



## Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

<b>intuition</b>	A belief based on how a person feels about something rather than what they know.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Chess players rely on both <b>intuition</b> and strategy to win games.</i>

<b>overrate</b>	To think that something is bigger, better, etc. than it really is.
[verb]	<i>Ex: I think he's highly <b>overrated</b> as a player.</i>

<b>filter</b>	Something that allows certain things to pass through but blocks others.
[noun]	<i>Ex: I need to buy a new <b>filter</b> for the coffee machine.</i>



<b>assess</b>	To judge the quality of something.
[verb]	<i>Ex: This test is designed to <b>assess</b> how well you might do in a technical job.</i>

<b>critically</b>	In a way that involves making careful and logical judgments.
[adverb]	<i>Ex: We <b>critically</b> review all of the articles that will be published in this newspaper.</i>

<b>logical</b>	Based on facts or evidence.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: We need to find a <b>logical</b> solution to this problem.</i>



## Exercise 2 – Reading

*Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.*

### Researchers Explore How Vaccine Beliefs Are Formed

The scientific community has long acknowledged that vaccines work and have saved millions of lives. However, a large community of "anti-vaxxers", particularly in the US, believes that vaccines are a health risk to children.

Now, scientists are trying to figure out how these beliefs are formed and how they spread.

Researcher Gordon Pennycook says that when it comes to complex ideas and concepts, our intuitions are often wrong, so we need to spend more time thinking about them. The problem, he says, is that we don't always do this because it takes a lot of mental energy.

This is linked to the Dunning-Kruger effect. It explains that people often overrate their skills or knowledge, and that the least skilled or least knowledgeable people are most likely to overrate themselves.



For example, people with little knowledge of vaccines may feel particularly confident about what they do 'know', whether it's correct or not. And when people feel confident, they aren't likely to try to challenge their own beliefs.

This creates a filter on new information. Information that a person agrees with is accepted, while evidence that proves them wrong is ignored. According to Panayiota Kendeou, that is the main problem when it comes to vaccinations.

Kendeou is an expert on misinformation and has researched how incorrect or misleading information is assessed by a person reading it. She says that when reading new information, people need to pay special attention to who made the claims and whether those claims make sense.

She adds that reading and accepting new information can be difficult if a person is feeling fearful. Fear of an immediate threat – even one that's not real – restricts a person's ability to think critically. However, a 2015 study found that if people who don't support vaccines are told about the very real dangers of not vaccinating children, they were more likely to change their minds.



Kendeou says that there are ways to combat bad information on vaccines, but changing people's beliefs is not easy.

"Having good logical arguments is a great first step," she says, adding that it's important to remind people to pay attention to where they are getting information from and to think critically about that information.

In order to teach students how to spot false or misleading information, some US states now require schools to include "media literacy" in their curriculums.



## Exercise 3 – Discussion

*Discuss the following questions with your tutor.*

1. What are your thoughts on the ways in which beliefs about vaccines are formed and spread?
2. Is there a large community of anti-vaxxers in your country? Please explain your answer.
3. Why do you think the least skilled or least knowledgeable people are most likely to overrate themselves?
4. How important would you say it is to challenge one's beliefs? Please explain your answer.
5. Who would you say is the most knowledgeable person you know? Please explain your answer.
6. Do you often have debates with your friends or family? If so, what topics do you usually discuss?
7. When was the last time you changed your opinion on a social or political issue?
8. Do you find it difficult to spot incorrect or misleading information on the internet?