

The Empathetic Refutational Interview

The Empathetic Refutational Interview (ERI) is a tool to guide conversations with individuals who are concerned about vaccination. The ERI is underpinned by techniques to display empathy and encourage reflection. It follows the following general steps:

1. **Elicit concerns** from the patient, inviting them to share their thoughts about vaccination. Practice **active listening** by reflecting what the patient is saying and considering the underlying reasons, or "attitude roots", that motivate the patient's hesitancy.

Attitude roots refer to deep psychological factors, such as a person's level of trust or distrust, that shape and constrain people's beliefs and attitudes.

In this step, we can ask **open-ended questions** to get the patient to explain in more detail why they hold this position. This signals more empathy and can also encourage the patient to reflect on the logic of their position.

- 2. Build empathy with how the patient is feeling by **affirming** the attitude root. It is possible to affirm an attitude root without agreeing with the specifics of the argument against vaccination. Most arguments contain a partial truth. Acknowledging this partial truth can help build receptivity and openness to further information.
- 3. Offer a **tailored refutation** of the misconceptions or flaws in the anti-vaccination argument. It is important to explain why the misconception is wrong and replace it with a tailored, acceptable alternative for the patient. Together with the empathetic affirmation in step 2, this encourages the patient to revise the belief without threatening their attitude root.
- 4. Provide **relevant facts** about vaccination, such as how vaccinations work, the benefits of vaccination against the risk of disease, or the collective benefit gained through vaccine-induced herd immunity.

Bear in mind the patient may wish to take more time to consider the information. Remember the goals of the conversation – if the patient is more receptive and the relationship is still maintained, this is a successful outcome. Remain open to discussing at a later time.

These steps are supported by an educational website, https://jitsuvax.info, which offers affirmations and refutations of 62 types of arguments against vaccines, classified by their attitude roots.



Rationale ERI steps Presume More effective than asking for input. vaccination Commence ERI if patient rejects vaccination. Establish common ground. Elicit concerns Help HCP understand attitude root. Express empathy. Affirm Increase receptiveness to further information. Invite belief revision in a way that Offer a tailored doesn't threaten attitude root. refutation Maintain receptiveness to further information. Provide facts Increase vaccine willingness. about vaccines

Throughout the ERI:

Maintain empathy:

- Communicate understanding of patient's experience, concerns & perspectives
- Use receptive language, e.g.:
 - Give acknowledgements
 - Show agreement

Embed Motivational Interviewing techniques:

- Active listening
- Open ended questions
- Allow for reflection

Steps may be repeated to address multiple concerns. Support for steps provided by website: https://jitsuvax.info

B. Conversation example following ERI steps



"What do you think about vaccinations?"

"I see you're worried about how your immune system would respond. Could you explain more to me about this?"

"It's normal to think so. Some medicines do get overused and prescribed when they aren't needed. I can see why you would wonder if this is the case for vaccines as well."

"That's a good question. It's one that people do ask, and I think we don't always realise that we only keep the vaccines that are really needed on the schedule. Vaccine experts take into account the potential side effects and weigh this against the risk of a disease overloading the immune system. For example, we don't recommend malaria vaccines even though they are available."

"Well, safety and effectiveness are important considerations, but also how severe the disease would be. For some diseases, like COVID-19 and polio, your immune system would be more overwhelmed if you get the disease without being vaccinated. The vaccines just train your immune system to recognise the viruses and fight back, reducing the amount of medication you would need to take if you caught it."

"They overload the immune system – there's vaccines for everything now, people are getting too many."

"Yeah, I try not to overmedicate. never take medication unless I really need it. I probably don't even go through one pack of paracetamol a year."

"Yes, exactly, why do we get so many?"

"I hadn't really thought about that. So why are some vaccines recommended?"

"Thanks, that's something to think about. I'm glad you understand what I'm saying. I guess I don't mind if it's just helping my body fight back."