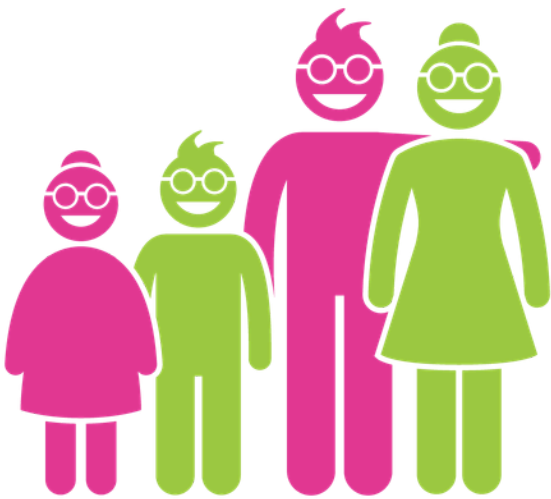


Family Advocacy Toolkit

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WHY FAMILY ADVOCACY MATTERS

IN THE FALL of 1953, fraternal twins Janice and Frankie were just starting first grade. Right before Halloween, Frankie stayed home with what seemed like a mild head cold—nothing too serious. But within days, he was struggling to breathe and had to be rushed to the hospital.

What followed was every parent's worst nightmare: a spinal tap, a diagnosis no one wanted to hear, and an iron lung. Being in that loud, confining metal tube, paralyzed and unable to breathe without help, must have been terrifying for seven-year-old Frankie. Tragically, he died just 61 hours after being admitted to the hospital.

That same evening, Janice was diagnosed with polio too. She survived, but had to relearn how to walk. Just six months after Frankie's death, the first polio vaccine trial began. A year and a half later, the vaccine was available in the United States. It would go on to save millions of lives—but it came too late for Frankie.

Today, Janice is a wife, mother, grandmother, and a proud polio survivor. She still misses her brother. She also worries. "As more and more parents question the necessity and safety of vaccinations [mostly because of so much misinformation online] I must confess that I am worried," she says.

Most of us have never seen polio firsthand. It's easy to feel like it's something from the past. That's the tricky thing about the incredible success of vaccines. They've worked so well that we've forgotten just how dangerous these diseases really are and that they are still a threat. It's not just polio. We could tell a similar story about meningitis or whooping cough. These illnesses haven't disappeared—they're just being held at bay by vaccines.

If we stop vaccinating, these diseases return to threaten our children.

That's why all of us have an important role to play. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or family friend, you can help keep kids safe by being a trusted voice and advocate for vaccines. This toolkit was created to give you the facts and tools you need to speak up and share your vaccine support. It's about helping others make informed choices, and being there for those who may have questions or concerns.

VACCINES WORK.

They protect the people we love. And with your help, we can make sure they continue to protect the children we love.

A HERO'S WELCOME FOR VACCINES

SOMETIMES people say the diseases we vaccinate against aren't that serious. But the truth is, many of these illnesses can be life-threatening—and vaccines have done an amazing job of keeping them at bay.

Here are just a few facts to keep in mind



Vaccines **prevent 4–5 million deaths** every year! (WHO)

Measles deaths worldwide **dropped by 78%** in just eight years (2000–2008) thanks to vaccines. (Vaccines.gov)



Rotavirus and pneumonia still take the lives of **nearly 1.2 million children** under 5 every year—many of these deaths could be prevented if vaccines were available to all children. (UNICEF)

One woman dies **every 2 minutes** from cervical cancer, even though we have a vaccine that helps prevent it. (GAVI)



Rubella is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable birth defects. Around **100,000 babies are born each year** with severe disabilities that could have been prevented with a simple vaccine. (PLOS ONE 2016)

TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

LET'S START with what we mean by family advocacy. At its heart, it's about real conversations—person to person, parent to parent. It's not about memorizing a bunch of statistics. It's about sharing what you know, showing you care, and helping people make choices that keep their families healthy.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Some people are natural talkers, some love to organize community events, others feel more comfortable online. No matter your style, there's a way for you to make a difference.

Here are four common types of family-based advocacy:



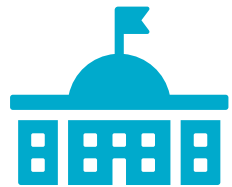
Peer-to-peer



Community-based



Online



**Legislator
education**

LET'S EXPLORE

each type and how it might work for you.

TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

Peer-to-peer

This is probably the most familiar kind of advocacy. It's just conversations—something we do every day. These chats matter, especially when they're with someone who's feeling unsure or has questions about vaccines.

Some tips that might help these talks go more smoothly:

- **Don't worry about being perfect.** You don't have to have all the answers. If you're being kind, respectful, and honest, you're doing a great job.
- **Be mindful of your tone.** What might feel like “helpful advice” to you could feel like pressure to someone else. Try to keep it light and friendly. Make it clear that you want to provide accurate information to help them make their own decisions.
- **Invite questions.** A lot of people are afraid they'll be judged for asking questions. Let them know it's totally okay—and even encouraged!
- **How you say something matters.** People often remember your tone and kindness more than your exact words. Be a good listener and create a space where they feel comfortable.
- **Be patient.** Most people who are unsure about vaccines aren't completely against them—they just need time and space to feel confident in their decisions.



TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

How to frame the conversation

Here's a simple way to guide your conversation: the **4-A Approach**. It's a helpful framework to keep things respectful and productive:



ASK

"What's your main concern?" Invite them to share what they're worried about.



ACKNOWLEDGE

Let them know their interest matters. "It's clear you've looked into this and really care about your child's health."



AFFIRM

Reassure them that asking questions is a good thing. "That's a really thoughtful question—I've wondered about that too."



ANSWER

Ask if you can share some info. "Would it be okay if I shared what I found from some trusted sources?"

TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

Community-based

If you love connecting with your community, this one's for you. Community-based advocacy helps make vaccine conversations a normal part of everyday life.

Here are some ways to get started:

- Work with your local library to highlight credible vaccine books
- Partner with your PTA or school for vaccine education events
- Team up with community groups like:
 - **4H:** They already value animal health—easy connection!
 - **Faith-based organizations:** Many leaders believe health and spirituality go hand-in-hand
 - **Rotary Clubs**
 - **Parent groups and neighborhood associations**
- Write a letter or OpEd for your local newspaper
- Volunteer with your state or local immunization coalition
- Set up an “Ask the Expert” table at school open houses or back-to-school nights
- Ask local businesses to host a wellness day or flu shot clinic



EASY WAYS

to partner with community groups:

- **Suggest a Girl Scout science badge activity focused on vaccination**
- **Offer to speak with a 4H club about herd health (animal and human!)**
- **Share flu shot reminders in bulletins or newsletters from places of worship**

TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

Online

Social media is part of daily life for so many of us, and it's also where a lot of people get their information—even about important topics like health. That's why it's such a powerful place to share the facts and help cut through the noise.

Social media can be tricky, but it's where many conversations are happening—so your voice really matters there.

If you've ever shared a story about your child's first day of school or posted a throwback from a family vacation, you already know how to connect with people online. Advocacy on social media can be just as natural—it's simply talking about what matters to you.

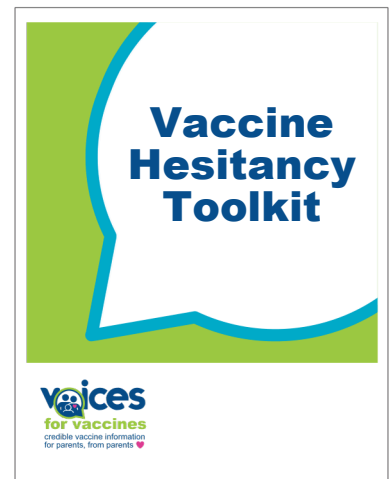
Your positive, calm voice can make a big difference in someone else's day, or even help them make an informed decision about vaccines.

Here are some ideas for getting involved:

- Join pro-vaccine groups to stay informed and connected
- Share pro-vaccine memes, infographics, and personal stories
- Highlight online learning opportunities
- Report misinformation when you see it

A FEW TIPS

- **Stay calm and kind.** It's easy to feel frustrated, but keeping things respectful helps your message land better.
- **Know when to walk away.** Some people aren't looking for a conversation—they're looking for a fight. It's okay to say "no thanks" and move on.
- **Use your voice for good.** Even if you don't convince everyone, your comments may help someone else who's reading quietly on the sidelines.



You can find more detailed strategies for online discussions in the Vaccine Hesitancy Toolkit.

TYPES OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

Legislator education

Our voices matter, even with our elected officials. They're used to hearing from professionals, but your personal story carries real weight.

Learn how to share your story in a powerful and heartfelt way. The resources section includes tools to help you write to lawmakers and even submit letters to your local paper.



AND REMEMBER:

your story can be a powerful catalyst for change.

COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

IT’S IMPORTANT to help correct false information—whether you're chatting with someone online or having a conversation in person. On social media, this can feel especially tricky because people who are strongly against vaccines sometimes use debate tactics that make discussions feel frustrating or circular.

Here are a few common tactics you might encounter online—and gentle, respectful ways to respond if you choose to engage:

Appeal to emotion

Emotions often show up in discussions about health and safety. But sometimes, arguments rely only on fear or worry, without much evidence. It helps to acknowledge how someone is feeling, and then gently return to the facts.

Try saying:

“I understand that hearing such things can be really frightening. Let’s look at what the facts tell us so we can feel more grounded in the truth.”

Special pleading (moving the goalposts)

Sometimes, when a point is clarified or disproven, a person might shift the topic or add a new exception. This can make it hard to have a focused conversation.

Try saying:

“I noticed the topic has changed. Before we move forward, can we try to come to a shared understanding about what we were just talking about?”

COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

Burden of proof

If someone makes a claim, it's okay to kindly ask for evidence. You don't have to disprove it yourself.

Try saying:

“I know it can be frustrating to feel questioned, but when someone makes a claim, it's fair to ask for supporting facts. Could you share your sources?”

Black-or-white thinking

This kind of thinking suggests that something must be either all good or all bad, but most things—including vaccines—live somewhere in the middle. Using everyday comparisons can help explain risk more clearly.

Try saying:

“It's true—nothing in life is 100% risk-free. But vaccines are one of the safest things we do, and they help protect us just like seatbelts or helmets do.”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

Anecdotal argument

Personal stories can be powerful—but they don’t always reflect the bigger picture of research findings. It’s okay to honor someone’s experience while also pointing to broader scientific understanding.

Try saying:

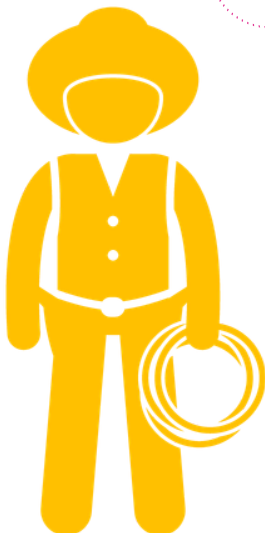
“I appreciate that this story is meaningful. When we’re making choices for our health, it helps to also look at the larger patterns in the science and what research tells us. Here’s what we know...”

Texas sharpshooter (cherry-picking)

Sometimes, people highlight only the data that supports their belief. In science, we look at the full picture to get accurate answers.

Try saying:

“Some of the information you mentioned supports your view, but it’s important to look at all the evidence. When scientists do that, they often reach a very different conclusion.”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

In-group bias

We tend to trust people who are like us—and that’s natural. But sometimes, it’s worth stepping back and considering what experts outside our circles are saying too.

Try saying:

“I value what people close to me think, but when it comes to health, I put my trust in experts who are trained to look at all the evidence.”

Belief bias

When we already believe something, it’s easy to accept anything that supports it—even without strong evidence. A gentle way to invite someone to think critically is to ask them to flip the script.

Try saying:

“Just as a thought experiment—what would you say if you were trying to argue the other side? Sometimes that helps us see the full picture.”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

Backfire effect

Sometimes, people hold onto their beliefs even more strongly when shown contradictory evidence. That’s why asking thoughtful questions often works better than trying to “correct” someone directly.

Try saying:

“I can see you’ve done some research. I’m curious—how do you think scientists went from where you are now to strongly supporting vaccines?”

The Dunning-Kruger effect

This describes when someone feels very confident in a subject they’ve just started exploring—before realizing how complex it really is. A respectful nudge toward trusting experts can go a long way.

Try saying:

“I respect that you’ve spent time looking into this. I also know that experts have spent years studying it deeply, and I feel confident relying on their conclusions.”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

Gish gallop

This happens when someone throws out a long list of points, making it hard to respond to everything. It's okay to slow things down.

Try saying:

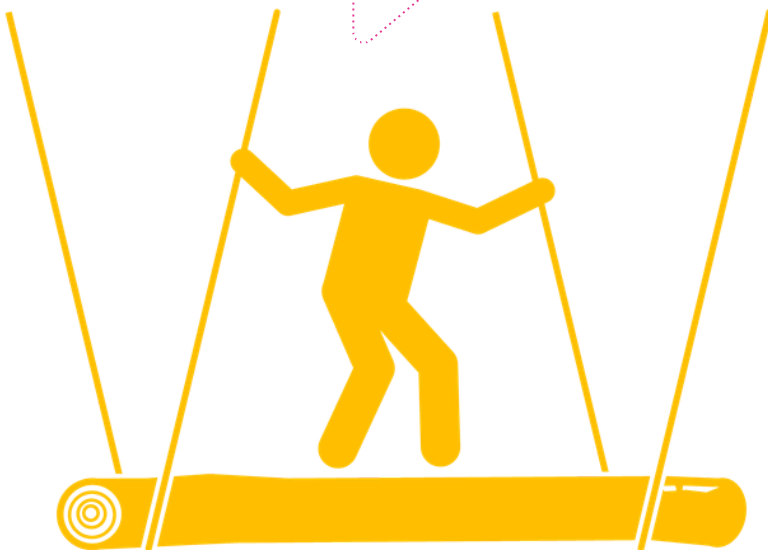
“That’s a lot of information! Could we focus on the one issue that matters most to you right now?”

False balance

Sometimes, it seems like two opinions should be given equal weight—even if one is from a leading expert and the other is not. It's okay to point out that not all voices carry the same level of expertise.

Try saying:

“It’s important that we base our decisions on trusted experts who rely on evidence—not just on opinions. That helps keep everyone safer.”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

The shill gambit

Sometimes people claim others are only sharing their view because they’re being paid. This sidesteps the facts.

Try saying:

“Let’s stay focused on the topic and stick to the facts, rather than guessing at each other’s motivations.”

Just asking questions

Some people use lots of questions to stir doubt, rather than to understand. You can gently steer the conversation to something more meaningful.

Try saying:

“It sounds like you have a lot on your mind. What’s the most important question to you right now—and why?”



COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA “DEBATE” TACTICS

Appeal to nature

Just because something is natural doesn't mean it's always good for us. But it's okay to honor the idea behind this instinct.

Try saying:

“I get wanting to trust nature. The amazing thing is—vaccines actually work with our natural immune system, helping it fight off serious diseases.”

Appeal to conspiracy theory

When people feel powerless, conspiracy theories can take hold. These beliefs can be hard to shift, and it's okay to step back if needed.

Try saying:

“I know it can feel hard to trust big systems. But health organizations across the world are made up of people who truly want to help others.”



A QUICK NOTE:

If someone is deeply entrenched in conspiracy thinking, it's okay to decide not to engage further. These conversations can spiral quickly, and protecting your energy matters too.

SOME GUIDANCE IF YOU DO CHOOSE TO ENGAGE

Be polite... to a point

- If someone is bullying, report them. You don't have to accept harassment.
 - If someone says something offensive, especially comparing vaccines to tragedies like the Holocaust, it's okay to clearly and calmly say that it's harmful and unacceptable.
-

Use “we,” not “I” or “you”

Saying “**we**” helps make conversations feel more inclusive. It also keeps the tone open and respectful.

“We don’t have to agree, but we can agree to keep things respectful. We all want what’s best for our kids.”



Don’t escalate, and don’t take the bait

If someone gets heated, don’t sink to their level. You can call out bad behavior kindly and then step away.

SOME GUIDANCE IF YOU DO CHOOSE TO ENGAGE

Know when enough is enough

If you've gone back and forth several times and things aren't moving forward, it's okay to walk away. Sometimes continuing the debate only spreads more misinformation.

Let people know you're stepping away

If you just disappear from the conversation, it might look like you had no response. It helps to end with a short, respectful message:

"I don't think this conversation is going anywhere helpful, so I'm stepping away. If you ever want good, science-based info, I'd be happy to help."

Report misinformation

Social media platforms all have ways to report harmful or misleading content. Taking a moment to do this can help slow the spread of false info.

Look for three dots in the corner of a post or tweet, then choose "Report."

Helpful Links:



How to report
on Facebook



How to report on X
(formerly Twitter)



How to report
on TikTok



How to report
on YouTube

SOME GUIDANCE IF YOU DO CHOOSE TO ENGAGE

And finally... it's okay to step away

If you've tried, but the person just isn't ready to hear it, that's not a failure on your part.

Try saying:

"I'm sorry you're not in a place to consider the facts right now. If that changes and you're looking for reliable info later, I'm here."



LET'S DO THIS TOGETHER...

for our kids, for our communities, and for a healthier future for all. Whether you're just starting out or you've been an advocate for a while, thank you for being here. Your voice matters.

CREDIBLE WEBSITES AND BOOKS ON VACCINES AND IMMUNIZATION

THESE WEBSITES AND BOOKS are trusted sources for vaccine information.

Websites

- **Voices for Vaccines:** voicesforvaccines.org – You'll find comprehensive vaccine resources, a glossary of immunology terms, information about credible resources, fact sheets for every vaccine, podcasts, on-demand webinars, guidance to debunk misinformation, and more!
- Immunize.org: vaccineinformation.org
- Immunize for Good: immunizeforgood.com
- Vaccine Education Center: chop.edu/vaccine-education-center
- National Network for Immunization Information: immunizationinfo.org
- Vaccinate Your Family: vaccinateyourfamily.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/vaccines
- American Academy of Pediatrics: aap.org/immunization
- History of Vaccines: historyofvaccines.org
- Engaging Families: A Coalition Toolkit
- Community Immunity Toolkit
- Family Advocacy Toolkit
- Healthcare Providers Toolkit
- New Parent Toolkit



CREDIBLE WEBSITES AND BOOKS ON VACCINES AND IMMUNIZATION

Books for Parents

- *Autism's False Prophets: Bad Science, Risky Medicine, and the Search for a Cure*, by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Bad Faith: When Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine*, by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Bad Science: Quacks, Hacks, and Big Pharma Flacks*, by Ben Goldacre
- *Bad Advice: Or Why Celebrities, Politicians, and Activists Aren't Your Best Source of Health Information*, by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Deadly Choices. How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All*, by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Do Vaccines Cause That?! A Guide for Evaluating Vaccine Safety Concerns*, by Martin G. Myers, MD, and Diego Pineda
- *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine*, by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Immunity*, by William E. Paul, MD
- *On Immunity: An Inoculation*, by Eula Biss
- *The Panic Virus: A True Story of Medicine, Science, and Fear*, by Seth Mnookin
- *Panicology: Two Statisticians Explain What's Worth Worrying About (and What's Not)*, by Hugh Aldersey-Williams and Simon Briscoe
- *Polio and Me*, by Ken Dalton
- *Pox. An American History*, by Michael Willrich
- *Tabloid Medicine: How the Internet is Being Used to Hijack Medical Science for Fear and Profit*, by Robert Goldberg, PhD
- *Your Baby's Best Shot. Why Vaccines Are Safe and Save Lives*, by Stacey Mintzer Herlihy and E. Allison Hagood
- *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, by John M Barry
- *Viruses, Plagues, and History: Past, Present and Future*, by Michael B. A. Oldstone, MD



www.VoicesForVaccines.org