



The Empathetic Refutational Interview (ERI)

Improving vaccine conversations

The Empathetic Refutational Interview (ERI) is a communication framework designed to guide health workers' conversations with people who express concerns about vaccinations.



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Population vaccine hesitancy is a significant risk to public health.¹ Vaccine concerns are often fueled by misinformation.² Misconceptions can be difficult to correct when people are committed to views for strong personal reasons.³ The JITSUVAX project developed the ERI to support productive conversations with people who have concerns about vaccines.

Why is a communication framework needed?

Health workers have a vital role in vaccine promotion because people trust them.⁴ Many health workers find it challenging to discuss and recommend vaccination with people who have concerns about vaccines.⁵ Health workers want and need training to improve these skills.⁶ The JITSUVAX Project developed the ERI to meet this need.

What is the ERI?

The ERI is an evidence-based, four-step method designed to equip health workers with skills for effective vaccine conversations. Techniques include how to build trust and address misconceptions while maintaining rapport. The ERI is underpinned by core skills from 'Motivational Interviewing', a well-established empathetic communication approach.⁷ These are combined with cognitive science best practice for correcting misconceptions.

Benefits of the ERI

- A teachable, structured conversation framework
- Improves health workers' confidence and skills to approach conversations
- Adaptable to individual needs within a conversation
- Offers ways to handle strong emotions or distrust
- Improves people's vaccine acceptance and trust in health workers

The ERI helps build trust, address concerns and correct misinformation.
It supports people to make informed decisions about vaccination.

- In-person training is important to understand and practise the ERI steps and skills

Who can benefit from the ERI?



Health workers who discuss vaccines as part of their role



Public (patients or service users)



Organisations and commissioners



Educators (medical schools, training centres)

Core Principles of the ERI:

An evidence-based approach: combining the science of addressing misinformation effectively with evidence-based empathetic communication skills.

Supporting informed decision-making: the ERI empowers people to base their own decisions on reliable information (facts not fallacies).

Demonstrating empathy: empathy and understanding are core to the approach. It is about connecting with people and fostering trust.

Respecting people's attitude roots: the ERI recognises the psychological factors underlying people's vaccine concerns and works with these not against them.

What are attitude roots?

Attitude roots are the deeper psychological factors behind a person's beliefs. People are more likely to accept information that aligns with their attitude root and reject information that challenges it.⁸ The ERI is about tailoring vaccine communication to show respect for people's attitude roots, rather than directly challenging them.

The 4 Steps of the ERI



Techniques include:

- Open questions and active listening to identify the attitude root(s)
- Four affirmation approaches to build trust and show empathy
- Personalising communication to people's attitude roots
- Replacing misconceptions with an acceptable alternative view
- Providing the key information at the right point

Support and resources



Website: jitsuvax.info

- includes resources for understanding attitude roots
- information about the JITSUVAX research



Contact for training or more information: jitsuvax@bristol.ac.uk

The scientific background – the JITSUVAX Project

The ERI is built on a strong foundation of psychological research from the fields of the cognitive science of misinformation, communication, behavioural counselling and vaccine hesitancy. The ERI was shown to be effective in experimental studies during its development⁹ and in field studies in practice. Our research highlights the importance of correcting vaccine misconceptions with empathy and consideration for the attitude root of the patient's concerns.¹⁰ You can read more about the wider JITSUVAX research project and the science behind the ERI on our website.

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