

Tips for Talking to Women Who Are Hesitant About Screening

WIPE
OUT
cervical cancer
ALABAMA



OPERATION WIPE OUT Champions

Below are some suggestions on talking points when sharing information and/or educating others.

1 Start with Empathy and Trust

Acknowledge that getting screened can feel **uncomfortable** or **scary**.

- *"I understand. A lot of women feel nervous or unsure. You're not alone."*
- *"It's okay to have questions or to feel uneasy. Let's talk through it."*



2 Explain the Why in Simple, Empowering Terms

Don't lead with fear. Lead with **prevention** and **protection**.

- *"Cervical cancer is one of the few cancers we can actually prevent, and screening is how we catch it early before it becomes cancer."*
- *"It's not just about today. It's about protecting your future, your family, and your peace of mind."*

Never make someone feel ashamed for not being screened. Meet them with care and curiosity.

3 Address Common Fears and Misunderstandings

Start by asking:

- **"What concerns do you have?"**

Let them speak fully before jumping in. People respond better when they feel heard, not lectured. Focus on the specific concern.

- **"It's painful or embarrassing."**

"It's quick — usually just a few minutes. Some women feel slight pressure, but it shouldn't be painful. And the providers are trained to make you as comfortable as possible."

- **"I feel fine, so I don't need it."**

"Cervical cancer doesn't usually show symptoms until it's advanced. Screening is the only way to catch early changes while it is easy to prevent and/or treat."

- **"I'm too old/young/no longer sexually active."**

"If you're 21–65, you still need screening, even if you're not currently sexually active."

- **"I had a bad experience before."**

"I'm so sorry that happened. There may be providers in your area who are known for being respectful and provide good care to their patients. I'd be glad to help you find one."

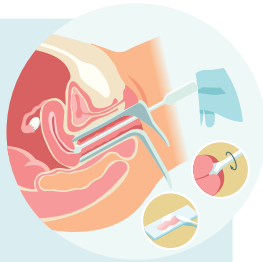


4 Break Down the Process

Demystify what to expect.

- “At your appointment, they’ll ask you to lie back and do a quick swab of your cervix and that’s it. You stay fully covered except for the area being tested. It usually takes less than 10 minutes.”

Offering a visual (like a diagram) can help.



6 Normalize It Through Shared Stories

Make it feel like a **normal part of self-care**.

- “I go every few years. It gives me peace of mind.”
- “It’s just like getting a mammogram or a blood pressure check, a regular part of taking care of ourselves.”



5 Offer Solutions to Practical Barriers

Address **transportation, time, cost, or childcare**.

- “You’re not alone — life is busy, and resources can be tight. The good news is that screening is covered by health insurance plans and there is no deductible. If you do not have health insurance there is a program (**Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program**) that offers free screening and follow-up. Let’s find out what’s available near you. You shouldn’t have to choose between your health and everything else.”
- “I can help you find a clinic that works with your schedule or budget. You don’t have to do it alone.”

7 Leave the Door Open, and Don’t Pressure

Sometimes **women aren’t ready today**. Respect that.

- “No pressure at all — I just want you to have the facts. Whenever you’re ready, I’m here to help.”
- “Even just thinking about it is a good first step. You’re doing great.”



Additional Quick Tips

Concern	What You Can Say
“It’s embarrassing.”	“That’s normal, but providers are professionals, and it’s over quickly.”
“I don’t have time.”	“There are clinics with short wait times or Saturday hours.”
“I had a bad Pap once.”	“Following up early can prevent something worse later.”
“I’m scared of the results.”	“That’s understandable, but if something is wrong, catching it early gives you the best chance.”

DISCLAIMER: The purpose of these tips is to facilitate conversations based on our experience in Alabama as well as recent scientific literature. It is not encompassing of all concerns **OPERATION WIPE OUT** champions and partners will face in the community.

For more information and resources go to www.operationwipeout.org and/or reach out to **OPERATION WIPE OUT** coordinating partners.

