

Tips for communicating in a hospital setting

You can customized this document and share it with a healthcare professional.

General Tips:

- Do not assume a lack of capacity because of my speech impairment or my use of a board or device
- Speak directly to me, in the same manner and tone you would use with any patient
- Book more time to allow me to communicate what I want to say
- Move to a quiet space or reduce noise and visual distractions as this helps you focus on what I am communicating
- If a person is accompanying me, ask me if I would like some time alone with you. If I don't want this, find out if I am comfortable with you sharing my health information with this person
- Do not assume an accompanying person makes decisions on my behalf

When you are talking to me:

- Slow your talking rate slightly
- Pause between sentences to give me time to process what you are saying
- Present one idea at a time
- Use everyday language

- Allow more time for me to respond
- Use a variety of types of questions including open-ended questions, yes/no questions, either/or questions and multiple-choice questions
- Show me what you are talking about using pictures, diagrams and objects
- I may want you to write down key words that you are saying
- Ask questions to make sure I understand what you are saying

When I am communicating with you:

- If it is not obvious, ask me how I communicate
- Ask if I have instructions to tell you what to do when communicating with me
- Be honest if you can't understand what I am communicating. It's okay to say, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you just said," or "Can you repeat that or tell me that in another way?"
- If you repeatedly can't understand me, stop and try to problem solve. For example, ask:
 - "Do you have a communication board, or device that you use to communicate?"
 - "Do you have anyone with you that you want to help with communication?"
 - "Do you want me to call someone who knows you to learn more about how you communicate?"
 - Look in the chart or referral for notes on communication strategies.

- If I don't have a way to communicate, ask if I can write, point to letters to spell out my message or point to pictures of things I want to say. Have a supply of commercially available communication displays that you can use in the event that I don't have a way to communicate or someone to assist me.