

Healthcare Providers

Adapted from an article by Kelsey Mandak, April 8, 2020

[Read Kelsey Mandak's full article on the RERC website](#)



- Always stand where the patient can see you. Be sure the patient can hear you. Speak clearly and more loudly if you are wearing a mask.
- If the patient had a pre-existing disability, check to see if they have:
 - **A health passport** with critical medical information.
 - **A description of how they communicate** (e.g., do they have an alphabet board, picture board, or iPad that they use to express themselves).
 - **Instructions for how they want you to communicate with them.**
 - **A contact person who can help if communication breaks down.**
- If the patient is temporarily unable to speak due to intubation or other medical treatment or if you are unable to locate the patient's communication supports,
 - **Establish yes /no signals**
 - Yes /no responses might include a head nod or shake, thumbs up or down, looking up or looking down
 - Ask "How do you communicate 'no'?" and observe carefully. Repeat for 'yes' signal
 - Once these signals are established, record them in the patient's medical chart and **post them bedside or over the bed for other healthcare providers**

- **Ask one question at a time and wait** for the patient to respond. Provide choices one at a time.
 - For example, ask the patient “Are you in pain?”
 - If the patient communicates “yes”, then ask questions one at a time to identify the location of the pain. Wait after each question.
 - For example, ask “Does your head hurt?” and wait for a response. “Does your chest hurt?” and wait for a response.
- **Confirm with the patient that you understood their response correctly**
- **Explain to the patient what is happening.** Use gestures and demonstrations or show pictures to support understanding as needed. Confirm that they have understood.
- **Give the patient other ways to communicate.** Ask the patient to write, spell messages or to point to written words or pictures to communicate needs. [Click here for free communication boards.](#)