



Emergency Communication Plan for Seniors and People with Disabilities

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Be Prepared!

There are many reasons to have an emergency communication plan in place, and in this time of COVID-19, planning how to let people know about your unique communication needs and how to stay in communication with each other is even more critical.

This period of isolation is for our safety, but it can come at a high price to our mental health and our ability to stay safe and meet basic needs. Elders and people with disabilities who face communication challenges are particularly at risk if you have to go to a hospital without a support person, or if your regular caregivers get sick.

Emergency Situations: What if...?

Think through the questions before there is a crisis...

- How can I get help if I can't speak?
- How can I calm my nonverbal child who is in isolation in the hospital?
- What if my caregiver doesn't come or gets sick and I have to go somewhere else to be safe?
- What if I can't hear what medical staff are saying?
- How can I talk to Grandma when she is in lock-down in a nursing home?
- How do I know what papers I am signing if I can't read them?
- What assumptions do people make about my abilities?
- How will isolation procedures affect communication with my doctors?



Document what is normal for you

It is important, especially for medical staff, to be able to distinguish what is normal for you from what they see during an emergency. For example, if they see that you have difficulty speaking, they need to know if the stroke that caused it was ten years ago or this morning, or if there is another reason.



Expressive Communication

Describe your primary language and preferred modes of expressive communication with enough detail to give a person you have never met guidance on how to understand and respond to you.

- Do you use sign language or stutter?
- Do you write notes or use an Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) board or device?

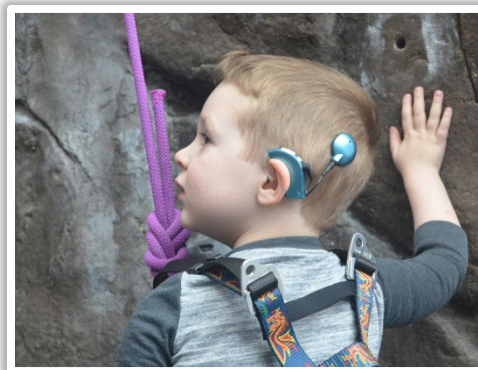
Hearing

In a medical situation, not hearing what people are saying could be misunderstood as being non-responsive or possibly having a brain injury rather than hearing loss.

Having a cochlear implant may require different diagnostic techniques.

Not everyone who is Deaf uses sign language.

Some people need instructions in a visual format rather than spoken aloud. Include details such as “No hearing in my right ear. Speakers need to sit, stand or walk on my left side.”



Vision

If your eyes don't track together or if you have a limited field of vision, a medical team might mistake your normal for a wrong diagnosis.

Don't be afraid to ask for documents to be read to you or for versions in alternate formats that meet your needs.

Other Communication Issues

Consider what someone completely new to you would need to know in order to understand and respond to your unique needs, such as whether you have a diagnosed mental illness, dementia, autism, Tourette's Syndrome, or an intellectual disability which might otherwise be misinterpreted in an emergency situation.



Things to Take if You Go to the Hospital: Your “Go Bag”

- Identification & insurance information
- Medical information including doctors, diagnosed conditions, medications, allergies, implants, etc.
- Advanced Medical Directive or POLST
- Communication Profile to let people know the best way to communicate with you (There is one for you to edit at the end of this document.)
- Instruction book that shows new care providers the specifics of your normal care routines (include QR code links to video clips).
- Glasses / contacts
- Hearing aids/Cochlear implant processor (Include a bag or case for them so they don't get lost when you aren't wearing them, and extra batteries)
- Headphones for amplification and privacy.
- Tablet or smartphone for video communication (Make sure they are labeled with your name. Consider a lanyard for your phone to keep it within reach and a stand for a tablet.)
- Passwords so someone can help you connect if you are too weak, or to download new apps if needed.
- Power supply and charging cords (consider an extra-long one).
- AAC device and low-tech backup.
- Plan how you will contact your family and practice before you go.

Contact List

- Who will you need to communicate with?
- Who can answer the care team's questions if you can't and how can they be reached?
- Who is authorized to make medical decisions for you if you can't?
- Who else is in your Circle of Support?

Medical Power of Attorney / Healthcare Directives

If you haven't designated a medical power of attorney, do it now. Discuss your wishes fully with your doctor and the person designated to make the decisions if you can't. (And with other family members who might disagree... it helps if everyone has heard your preferences directly rather than second-hand.) It also helps if the family has had these discussions in advance rather than in a crisis.

<https://hospicefoundation.org/Hospice-Care/Advance-Care-Planning>

Resources

Covid-19: Medical Communication for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

<https://www.nad.org/covid19-communication-medical-access-for-deaf-hard-of-hearing/>

Hospital kit for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing

<https://www.hlaa-indianapolis.org/resources/hospital-kits>

Covid-19 information for Deaf & Hard-of Hearing

<https://www.chadruffinmd.com/covid19-dhh>

Ready Now (Tab 7: Tips for Specific Disabilities)

<https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-01/ReadyNow-2014.pdf>

Ready.gov Individuals with Disabilities

<https://www.ready.gov/disability>

UTSE Personal Readiness and Go Bag Information

https://www.uwyo.edu/wind/_files/docs/utse_resources/utse_go_kit_bag_4_18.pdf

A Caregivers' Checklist for Hospital Trips

<https://www.nextavenue.org/caregivers-checklist-hospital-trips/>

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund COVID-19 Advocacy and Resources

<https://dredf.org/covid-19-advocacy-and-resources/>

My Communication Profile

My Name:

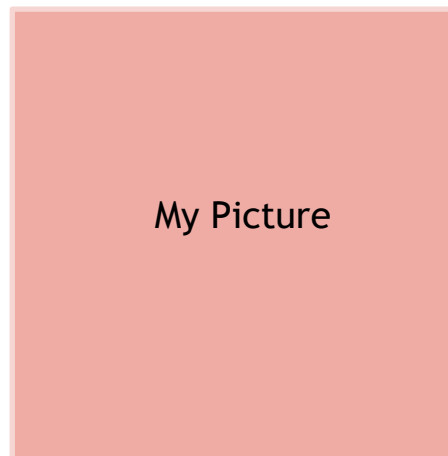
Address:

Home phone:

Cell phone:

Medical decision maker:

Contact number:



Communication Access Notes:

My primary language:

Expressive communication:

I normally have clear speech.

I have speech articulation difficulties:

I have aphasia:

I use a speech generating device:

I use a text-based communication board or write notes.

I use a symbol communication system:

I use sign language: 1) ASL 2) SEE Sign 3) a few signs

I point and use gestures.

Vision/reading:

I need glasses / contacts:

Diagnosed vision loss:

I have a limited field of view:

I use a white cane or guide for orientation and mobility.

I can read normal print.

I can read large print. Size needed:

I cannot read large print. I need written materials read to me.

I read Braille.

Reading comprehension: 1) college level 2) more than 8th grade

3) 4th grade - 8th grade 4) less than 4th grade 5) I read basic words

Hearing:

Normal hearing.

I need amplification.

I need visual supports (lip reading, visual attention, pictures)

I am Deaf and cannot hear you speak.

I need a sign language interpreter.

I need real-time captioning.

I am DeafBlind and need tactile communication: 1) Tactile sign

Language 2) Print-on-palm 3) Braille communication device

4) Morse Code 5) Other:

I have trouble understanding spoken directions (auditory processing disorder, etc.)

I don't understand spoken English very well.

Other communication issues:

I have autism:

I have a developmental disability/intellectual disability:

I have a mental /emotional illness:

I have dementia/Alzheimer's:

Other:

Other things you should know about me:

- Things that calm me:
- Interests:
- Things that motivate me:
- Things that discourage or trigger me:
- Other:

You can find more information about me:

(videos of my care routine, copy of my communication pages, how I use my communication device, etc.)

Communication Device Details

(For safety, keep this information in a secure place. Any automatic payment or financial account information should not be stored on the device without additional security measures.)

Device / Account	ID / number / description	Password / passcode
Email		
Cell phone		
Apple or Google ID		
Tablet or computer		
AAC		
Apps being used & log-in (Facebook, Zoom, Skype, etc.)		

Family / Important Contacts

Name:

Relationship:

Cell phone number:

Home phone number:

Email:

Other connections (Text, Skype, Facetime, Zoom, etc.):

Family / Important Contacts continued...

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