



# ICU Assisted Communication Toolkit

## THE COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT INCLUDES:

- Yes/No board
- Whiteboard
- Alphabet board with partner-assisted scanning instructions on the back
- Symbol-based communication board
- Pain/feelings scale board
- Medical questions board

## TIPS TO REMEMBER AND USE:

- Be familiar with the patient's YES-NO signals
- Make sure the patient is wearing glasses and/or hearing aids
- Get the patient's attention by touching their shoulder or arm and locking eyes
- Speak with good volume, slowly, and distinctly
- Speak in simple phrases – like a TV announcer
- Repeat important words
- Use visuals when you talk:
  - Point and gesture
  - Point to pictures or phrases on a communication board while asking questions about needs or symptoms
- Allow the patient time to respond
- Always ask the patient to confirm what you think they were trying to say using their yes/no response

► ***If it is hard for the patient to point, please use “partner-assisted scanning”. See instructions on the back of the alphabet board.***

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION

### YES/NO responses

#### Identify clear YES/NO signals that:

- The patient can do consistently
- Are the least tiring
- Use YES/NO board or one of the following: (in order of recommendation)

YES SIGNAL:	NO SIGNAL:
Mouthing “Yes”	Mouthing “No”
Head nod	Head shake
Thumbs up	Thumbs down
Point to written YES	Point to written NO
Thumbs up	Thumb in fist
Smile	Pucker lips
Tap finger x 1	Tap finger x 2
Open hand	Close hand
Raise eyebrows	Close eyes tightly
Rapid eye blinks	Close eyes tightly
Look up	Look down
Blink x 1	Blink x 2
Squeeze hand x 1	Squeeze hand x 2
Any YES/NO signal above	Absence of response

### Ability to write and point

#### Can the patient write?

- Ask the patient to write their name and favorite color

### Cognitive skills

Please note that the communication toolkit is meant to be used with patients who have good cognitive status. It can be used with those that do not, but it may require practice and increased assistance from the communication partner.

#### Assess YES/NO signal accuracy:

Ask the patient to answer YES/NO questions using the clear signals you picked or the YES/NO board.

Examples:

1. Is your name Smith?
2. Is your name Brown?
3. Is your name \_\_\_\_\_? (patient's name)
4. Are the lights on in here?
5. Are you a doctor?
6. Are you in a bed?
7. Will paper burn in fire?
8. Does March come before June?
9. Is summer colder than winter?
10. Is a horse larger than a dog?

► ***If the patient does not demonstrate an accurate yes/no, this toolkit may not be appropriate.***

#### Can the patient point?

- Ask the patient to point to several letters or pictures on alphabet/ picture communication board





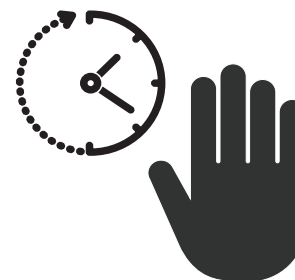
**YES**



**NO**



**DON'T KNOW**



**LATER**

# Whiteboard

Can be used with the alphabet board to write down the patient's messages or as a notepad for the patient to write.

*Please use a dry-erase marker.*

A	B	C	D	NEW WORD	END OF MESSAGE				
E	F	G	H	START OVER	I DON'T KNOW				
I	J	K	L	M	N				
O	P	Q	R	S	T				
U	V	W	X	Y	Z				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

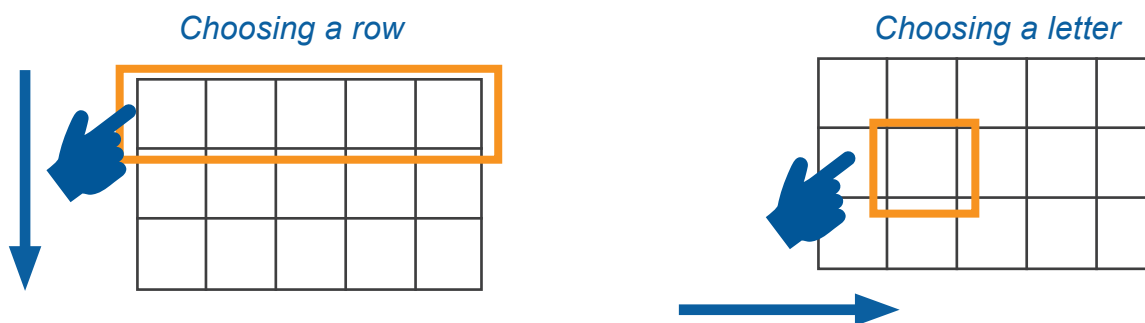
## If it's hard for the patient to point, please use partner-assisted scanning. This is how:

Ask the patient to think of a message to spell (simple, single word messages are often best).  
Establish the patient's "yes" (i.e. nodding, blinking, thumbs up, etc.).

1. **Cue the patient to focus on the 1st letter of the word.**
2. **Proceed row by row. Point to each row and ask if the letter is in that row.**  
(e.g. point to 1st row and ask, "Is it in this row?" followed by 2nd row, and so on)
3. **The patient will select a row using the established YES response. Verify the choice out loud.**
4. **Point to each letter within the selected row ("Is it A, B, C, D?").**
5. **The patient will signal the desired letter using the established YES response.**
6. **Confirm the selection & repeat.**

### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Hold this tool ~12 inches (~30 cm) from the patient's face.
- Ensure good lighting, head positioning, and vision.
- Speak loudly and clearly using simple language.
- Wearing masks and other PPE may make it difficult to understand speech. Consider using communication tools when speaking to the patient as well.
- If the patient can't use this tool effectively now, that does not mean the patient won't be able to use it later today, tomorrow, or this week. Continue to provide opportunities to support communication.



I NEED

SUCTION



VENTILATOR



CALL BELL



NURSE



DOCTOR

CALL MY  
FAMILYBREATHING  
TUBE

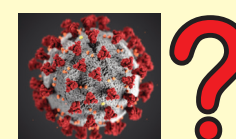
OXYGEN

TROUBLE  
BREATHING

MEDICINE



REPOSITION

WHAT'S MY  
STATUS

I FEEL

NAUSEA



TIRED



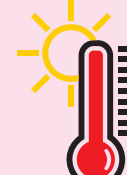
DIZZY



THIRSTY



HOT



PAIN

SORE  
THROAT

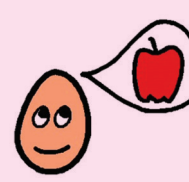
HEADACHE



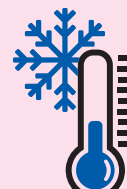
ITCHY



HUNGRY



COLD

SOMETHING  
ELSE

YES

MAYBE

I DON'T KNOW

LATER

NO

PERSONAL CARE

DENTURES



GLASSES



HEARING AIDS



BATHROOM



BED



PILLOW



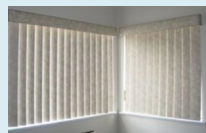
WASH FACE



LIGHTS ON/OFF



BLINDS OPEN/CLOSE



MOUTH CARE



CHAIR



BLANKET



HOLD HAND



MUSIC



LEAVE



ALPHABET BOARD

A	B	C	D	NEW MESSAGE	START DATE	END DATE	START TIME	END TIME
E	F	G	H					
I	J	K	L	M	N			
O	P	Q	R	S	T			
U	V	W	X	Y	Z			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

DAY



THANK YOU



I WANT

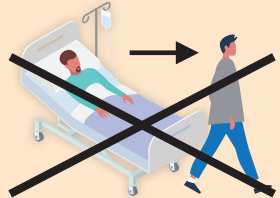
READ TO ME



PRAYER



DON'T LEAVE



PEN/PAPER



TIME



STOP



YES

MAYBE

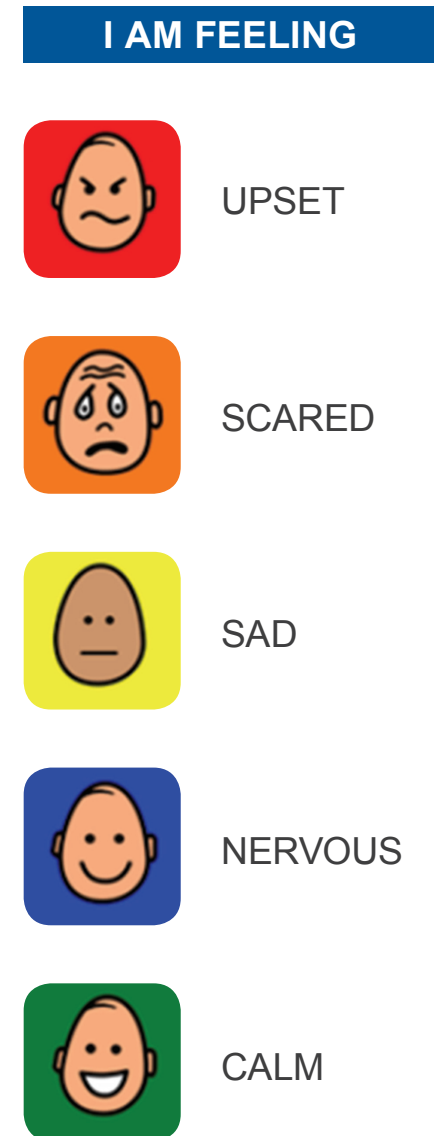
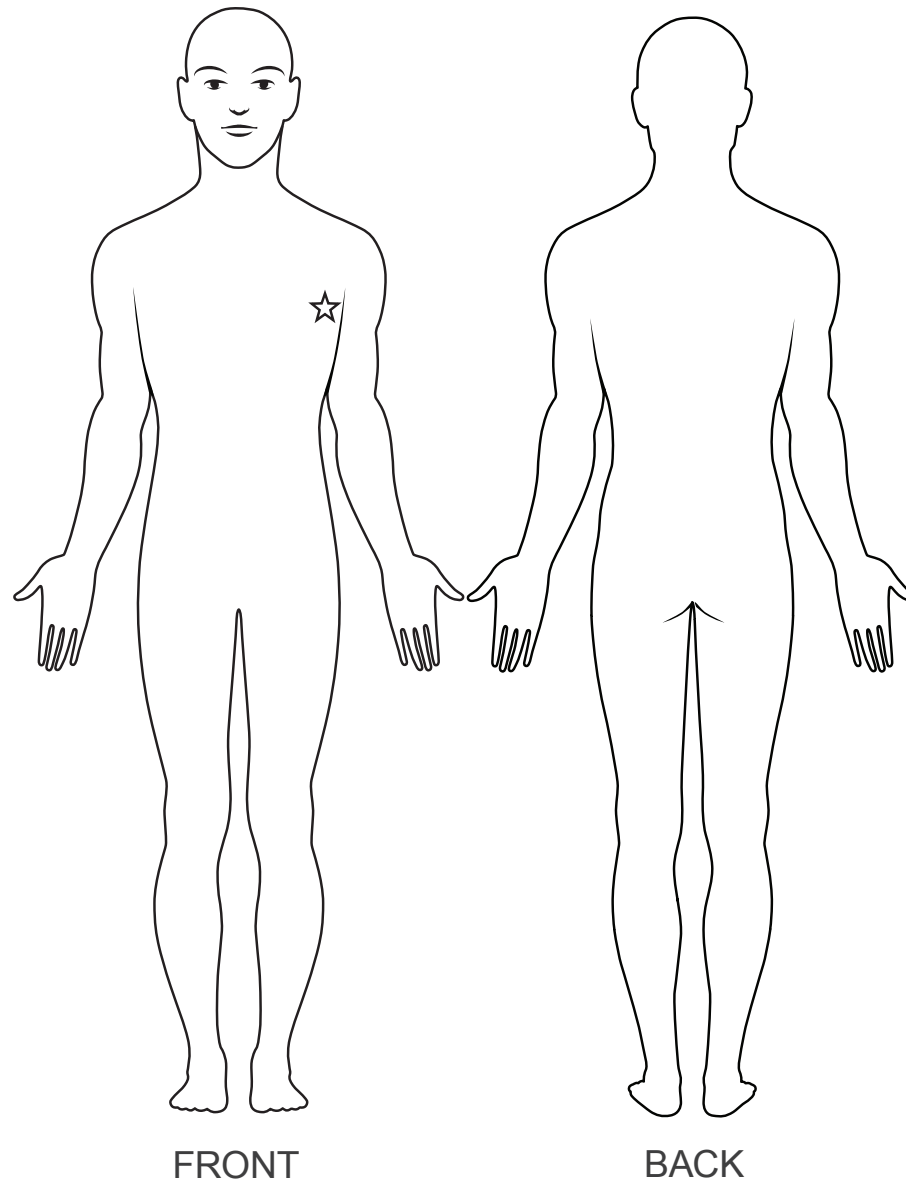
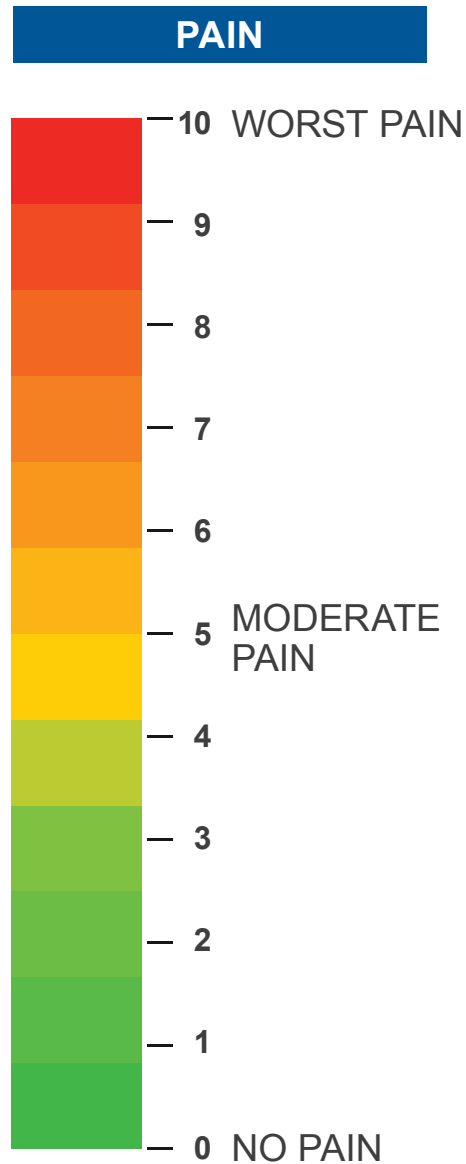
I DON'T KNOW

LATER

NO



# Pain/Feelings Scale



WHAT IS MY PROGNOSIS?	WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?	WILL I GET BETTER?	AM I GOING TO DIE?	
WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?	WILL I HAVE PAIN?	WHEN WILL I COME OFF THE VENTILATOR?	WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM TAKEN OFF THE VENTILATOR?	
I AM NOT READY TO MAKE A DECISION	I WANT TO DISCUSS MY DECISIONS	I WANT MY FAMILY TO DECIDE	I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION	
YES	MAYBE	I DON'T KNOW	LATER	NO