

## **Free Tools for Communicating During Disasters and Emergencies**

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**First responders can now access a rapidly growing body of free and downloadable communication boards, communication tip guides and mobile apps that are useful in overcoming communication barriers in a wide variety of emergency settings, from emergency shelters, to emergency rooms, to ambulances, to trauma centers, etc. These communication barriers impact a far larger proportion of the population that first responders must deal with than most people realize (disabilities, language barriers, temporary communication impairments, cultural barriers, etc.).**

**Many of the boards can be easily laminated or printed on heavy stock. The communication boards provide a variety of alternatives, from simple alphabet boards with a few key vocabulary items to elaborate boards with symbols, pain scales and alternative languages. The mobile apps have the special appeal of ease of access and convenience in situations where time so often is of the essence, and space is so often limited (*e.g.*, inside ambulances). The apps listed below represent just the tip of the iceberg of the resources that are now so quickly becoming available, but they illustrate the broad range of purposes that can be met by mobile apps in emergency settings, for people with language and cultural differences, for people with transitory or long-term communication difficulties, for those with low health literacy, and for other significant segments of the population.**

### **A. Downloadable Paper Resources**

**● Paramedic & EMS Symbol Board (Widgit Health) Developed with SPEAK Unlimited Inc. This symbol communication board was created as a tool to assist Paramedics and those in the Emergency Medical Services in interacting with any individual for whom clear speech is difficult or impossible. Available in British English and dual-language American / Spanish.**

**<http://www.widgithealth.com/downloads/paramedic-board.htm>**

**● Tips for First Responders (5th edition) is a 15-page, color-coded, laminated 4.5 x 5.5-inch field guide, incorporating “tip sheets” that provide**

information that first responders can use during emergencies as well as routine encounters. They are not meant to be comprehensive, but contain specific information that can be read quickly either before or while responding to an incident, and can be downloaded free or purchased in laminated field guide form.

Tips are included for persons with a wide range of disabilities, as well as Seniors, People with Service Animals, People with Mobility Challenges, People with Mental Illness, Blind or Visually Impaired People, Deaf or Hard of Hearing People, People with Autism, People with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, People with Cognitive Disabilities, and Childbearing Women and Newborns. May be purchased on the website (Laminated copy suitable for EMC vehicles @ \$5.75), or downloaded in English and Spanish for free at:

<http://cdd.unm.edu/dhpd/pdfs/FifthEditionTipsSheet.pdf>

- **The Hospital Communication Book:** Although it was designed specifically for communication in hospitals, the Hospital Communication Book is a fantastic (and free) resource for anyone who may need to support someone who requires communication enhancement supports. This 24 page book is full of information and will be equally useful for first responders, hospital staff, and people who need communication supports to read before an emergency situation hits. It is full of useful communication tips and has good illustrations which make it fun to read. Best of all you can download and use the information, including the sheets of symbols, for free. Have a look at this book, download it, and tell others about it.

<http://www.surreyhealthaction.org/downloads/Hospital%20Communication%20Book%20-%20version%202%20-%20web.pdf>

- **Language Identification Flashcard:** The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, uses this Language Identification Flashcard, containing 38 languages, to help identify the language of their respondents. It can be used by first responders to determine the language of their patients. The card can be downloaded for free at <http://www.lep.gov/ISpeakCards2004.pdf>

- **Communication Tool English and translation** developed through a partnership of Mount Carmel Health, Ohio State University Medical Center and OhioHealth. Health Information Translations provides education resources in

multiple languages for healthcare professionals and others to use in their communities. Resources are easy to read and culturally appropriate. Available for use as a public service without copyright restrictions at [www.healthinfotranslations.org](http://www.healthinfotranslations.org).

● English Communication Sheet available in the following languages: ● American Sign Language Arabic Bosnian Chinese Simplified Chinese Traditional English French Hindi Japanese Korean Marshallese Multilingual Portuguese Russian Somali Spanish Tagalog Ukrainian Vietnamese at: <https://www.healthinfotranslations.org/pdfDocs/CommunicationSheet.pdf>

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## **B. Free Mobile Apps**

### **1. ICE app (<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/ice-emergency-contact-widget-view-ice-information-from/id994371286>)**

● **What is it?** This app is a reference for first responders and emergency room personnel. The user stores name, contact, medical, allergy and insurance information so that emergency responders have quick access to it.

● **How much is it?** Free ● **Platforms:** iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

● **Reviews:** One user writes that “this app takes care of all the basics.” Some users say that the app crashes, however.

### **2. Phrase Board**

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/phraseboard/id380424676?mt=8#>) ● **What is it?** This iPad app is designed for people with speech difficulties. Users can indicate where and how much they hurt with scrollable lists and a chart of the human body. Phrase Board also lets users type custom messages, or even draw messages. The app is text-only.

● **How much is it?** Free

● **Platforms:** iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.

● **Reviews:** Reviews have been favorable, especially since the app is free. One user said Phrase Board “has all of the basic functions needed for a patient’s communication needs when speaking is not an option.” The main downside is the lack of a speech functions, but as one user noted, “what makes it worth

looking at is the free hand 'draw' feature that lets you draw with your finger if you don't know a word."

### **3. SmallTalk Aphasia**

**(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalkaphasia/id310102858?mt=8#>)**

● **What is it?** This app contains phrases and images to help people who have difficulty speaking. Users select the word or phrase, then let the app "speak." The categories include doctor's appointments and emergencies. Users can personalize the vocabulary as well. There is also a mouth-positioning feature that helps the user practice speaking at his or her own pace.

● **How much is it?** Free

● **Platforms:** iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

● **Reviews:** Users call this app "a real find for folks with communication challenges." Although the vocabulary is "limited," and there is no gender option, reviewers agree that the app is easy to use and facilitates communication for those with special needs.

### **4. SmallTalk Dysphagia**

**(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalkdysphagia/id337184701?mt=8>)**

● **What is it?** A communication app specifically intended for people with dysphagia; it contains a bank of 50 phrases and words based on eating equipment, meal assistance, diet, medication and other treatments. There are 4 video demonstrations of treatment techniques for swallowing.

● **How much is it?** Free ● **Platforms:** iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

● **Reviews:** A user with dysphagia says that it "fills an important void." Equally appealing is the ability to customize the app to one's needs.

### **5. SmallTalk Pain Scale (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-painscale/id403058256?mt=8>)**

● **What is it?** This app contains a series of images and pain descriptions that let the user communicate the type and level of pain. It is designed for people with aphasia, apraxia and dysarthria. ● **How much is it?** Free

● **Platforms:** iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

● **Reviews:** Some reviews mentioned that this app does not allow for sentence construction, or any editing. However, it does allow for a great deal of

specificity by offering vocabulary for “body parts, positional words, and pain-related adjectives (dull, sharp, aching, radiating, etc.).”

6. **iSpeech- Text to Voice Free** text-to-voice app. Simply enter any text and iSpeech will instantly read the words.

**(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ispeech-text-tospeech/id322329515?mt=8>)**

7. **iTranslate** translation tool that helps break down language barriers. State of the art technology allows you can speak any language in a second.

**(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/itranslate-universaltranslator/id288113403?mt=8>) add?**

8. **Medical Spanish App Free** app for English speaking health providers for asking medical questions to Spanish speakers in a yes/no format with audio.

**(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/audio-medicalspanish/id358738229?mt=8>)**

9. **ping4Alerts!** Free alert app to keep you informed and up to date on all your important local emergency alerts, critical news and events.

**(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ping4alerts!-publicsafety/id501990409?mt=8>) add?**