**Practice Matters:**

**Working with Interpreters**

Working with interpreters brings with it additional challenges to our interactions with children and families. Interpreters do not need to be used for every interaction with a child/family whose first language is not English. However, the following types of meetings should have an interpreter present:

* All formal meetings such as Child In Need meetings, Child Protection Conferences, LAC Reviews, PEP meetings etc.
* In any situation where important information needs to be discussed with a child or family – this could include meetings about placement moves for a young person, a Pathway Plan assessment session or anything relating to potential family law proceedings. These suggestions are by no means exhaustive; treat each situation on its own merits.
* For all LAC Initial Health Assessments – **this is a Children’s Services responsibility to source the interpreter.** Gender matching for health assessments should be prioritised, if possible.
* CAMHS appointments – these should be funded by health services but can be booked/supported via the UASC Team Co-Ordinator.
* As the English language of a young person or family develops, there can be greater flexibility in not using an interpreter but any decision about this should be discussed with a line manager and key professionals, on a case-by-case basis.

# Interpreting best practice tips:

* Book the interpreter as early and as far in advance as possible. Be aware that within different languages, different dialects can be common. If possible, attempt to undertake a pre session briefing so they know the exact point of the meeting. Likewise a post session debrief would also be beneficial.
* **Never use friends or family members to interpret:** they are not professionals in the field of interpreting, it increases the scopes for mistakes:
* Be very aware that the communication is highly different when there is an extra person involved. A child and family may well be reluctant to discuss sensitive information with someone they do not know present. Therefore it is vital that…..
* You endeavour to use the same interpreter with a child family as much as possible. If both the Worker and the young person/family are satisfied with the interpreter, then it is good practice to use the same person for any follow up interviews. This allows the young person/family person to feel more at ease with the interpreter and consequently more able to disclose their experiences.
* Do not talk through an interpreter. Direct all your questions to the child/family as if you were engaging in a conversation with someone who speaks English. For example: ‘Can you remember your birthday?’, rather than asking questions of the interpreter such as ‘can you ask him if he remembers his birthday?’ This is to ensure that the young person/family (non-English speaker) and the Social Worker (English speaker) are placed on an equal footing and is clearly beneficial to making the communication more natural.
* **Ask the interpreter to translate in the first person, child’s voice.** For example, the interpreter should translate ‘I would like to move to Buxton’ rather ‘she wants to move to Buxton.’
* In formal meetings where there are a number of professionals present, no other conversations should be taking place aside from the interaction with the child/family.
* ALL DISCUSSIONS at any meeting should be translated. Many young people can speak some English and can and **will** pick up if something is asked not to be translated.
* Be wary that the responses by the young person seem broadly what you would expect from the question you have asked. Regularly check with the young person if they understand the questions being asked. In addition to asking the young person via the interpreter, be wary of unresponsive body language. There are some apps that could also be used but these are not fool proof!
* Do not be afraid to appropriately challenge the interpreter if you are concerned, not everything is being translated
* Certain cultural norms may make it taboo to talk of certain matters to those considered as ‘outsiders’. For example a young person may be less willing to talk about their religion to someone of a different religious background. Of course, all young people are different though. It is the role of Social Workers to ensure that they provide all the necessary tools and arrangements are in place to enable the young person/family to speak freely without fear, embarrassment or hindrance about the consequences of what they might disclose. It also re-enforces the importance of the social worker building a meaningful, positive relationship with the young person/family.
* The young person must be given a choice regarding the gender of the interpreter required.
* **Remain vigilant to any changes in the interpreter’s voice or body language:** Any modulation in the interpreter’s voice can sometimes be a sign of a reproaching or disbelieving attitude on the part of the interpreter. Also remain aware of the non-verbal indicators such as body language and facial expressions.
* **The interpreter is there to interpret.** They should not engage in their own discussions with the child or family.
* **Ensure that from the moment the interaction starts, the interpreter translates everything.** It is particularly important that pleasantries/ice-breakers are interpreted to help the young person relax.
* If an interpreter offers views on the cultural background and references about the country of origin, these may be helpful but it should not be treated as subjective opinions.
* For Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, they may feel uncertain in disclosing certain matters pertinent to their age assessment owing to embarrassment or fear of loss of ties with their communities as a consequence of information they disclose.