

# WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS ON THE FRONTLINE

Across all frontline services for adults and children, interpreters provide a vital service for people who do not speak English or who communicate with sign language.

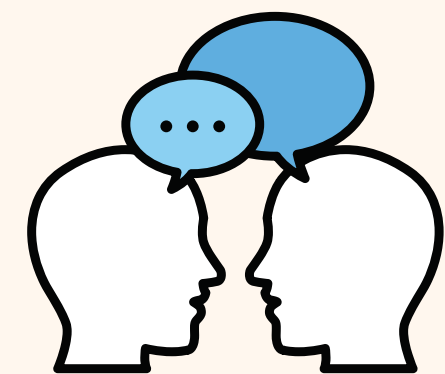
## We need to use interpreters to achieve:

- Better safeguarding interventions and outcomes for children and adults
- Equality of access to public services for adults and children
- Access to a fair trial
- Access to justice
- Reduced health and social inequalities

## Professional interpreters enable us to comply with:

- Equality Act 2010
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Care Act 2014
- The Children Act 1989
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- Health and Social Care Act 2012

And of course everyone wants to be heard and understood!



## It is ALWAYS better to use a professional interpreter than anyone else because:

- Friends and family may have a conflict of interest, even if you don't know about it.
- Friends and family can control the flow of information and you will not know it is happening!
- Interpreters have communication skills and independence that members of the public and fellow professionals do not.
- Children should NEVER be used as interpreters for their parents or siblings.
- Consider professional discretion when communicating with young children - weigh up pros and cons of using interpreters carefully depending on risk and circumstances.

## But working with interpreters is not easy!

Making the most of an interpreter's skills requires additional skills and knowledge for us as frontline professionals. This briefing should help you increase your skills and confidence in working with interpreters.

Continue reading for five top tips to help you in your work!

# Five top tips for working with interpreters

## Top Tip #1: Plan carefully when making the booking

- Allow extra time for the interview – having an interpreter significantly extends the time it will take to cover the same ground.
- Do you need to request a specific dialect for the language?
- Communicate with the interpreting service about your specialist area of the work when making the booking. Some interpreters have specialist experience and skills for working with specific service user groups e.g., with children.
- Consider whether the sex of the interpreter matters.
- If repeat interviews are needed it is preferable to book the same interpreter each time.
- Consider potential risks of the interpreter being from the same community/local area especially where Honour Based Violence may be an issue.
- Consider whether the service user comes from a country experiencing civil war, ethnic cleansing or tribal conflict.

## Top Tip #2: Prepare with your interpreter before the interview

- **ALWAYS** meet your interpreter alone before the interview!
- If it is a telephone interpreter, take time to speak to the interpreter on the phone before the service user joins the call.
- Explain the purpose and context of the interview.
- Check their familiarity with the subject matter and type of language that might come up.
- Reinforce confidentiality.
- Inform them of specific potential challenges - abusive language, mental disorder, learning disability, and how this might affect communication.
- Agree interpreting style – verbatim and first person is always preferable.
- Ensure they know that you want them to interpret **EVERYTHING** - even the swearing!!
- Ask them to tell you explicitly if they do not understand what the person is saying. This information can be indicative of mental disorder or intoxication.
- Consider the positioning with the interpreter including health and safety factors here. Do you both need an escape route?
- Ask them to tell you immediately if they know the person personally.

## Top Tip #3: Positioning options

Each positioning option has benefits and drawbacks - think about the specific situation, the space and the service user and how each might work.

Positioning the interpreter next to or behind the service user can be useful when the service user is hard of hearing.



Sitting or standing in a triangle can make it easy for everyone to see each other and pick up non verbal signs more easily. But it can be harder for you to control the dialogue this way.



Or positioning the interpreter just behind or beside you can help you to maintain control of the dialogue and build rapport. It also means you can see the service user's face throughout.



## Top Tip #4: Manage effective communication

- Introduce the interpreter and explain their role at the start. Explain to the service user that the interpreter will interpret EVERYTHING that is said verbatim.
- Avoid jargon and slang and avoid ambiguity in your speech as far as possible.
- Speak in the first person and pose questions and information directly to the service user e.g., "I have come to speak to you about...", "I am a social worker", "what are your symptoms?", "what are you worried about?"
- Don't talk in the third person.
- Break your speech into manageable clearly spoken chunks and pause between each chunk.
- Stop any independent dialogue between interpreter and service user firmly and promptly. Remind the interpreter they are there to interpret and not to direct the dialogue!
- Watch for signs from the interpreter that either you or the service user are speaking for too long at any one time. Use your body language to indicate to the service user the need to pause to allow for interpretation. A raised palm, for example, can effectively communicate the need to pause.
- Check back the service user's understanding at regular intervals during the interview eg "please explain back to me what I have said?"
- If there is a group of people, such as a family, wanting to speak, advise them that only one person can speak at a time.
- It is likely that you will need to revisit the rules and structure of the interview several times in order to retain control of the dialogue.

## Top Tip #5: Ending the interview

- Make sure you leave time for the service user to ask questions.
- Check back understanding of your next steps with the service user.
- After the interview check with the interpreter if there is anything they left out eg., abusive language, anything they were afraid to tell you in the interview.
- If the topic was distressing offer a debrief and provide reassurance that concerns raised will be taken seriously. It can be hard for interpreters to cope with the emotional strains of some interviews. Be aware and alert.
- Does the interpreter have any useful cultural knowledge or observations about the service user that may affect your perception of the interview - though remember that people from the same culture or community are not homogenous.



**Discuss this in your teams and in supervision.**

**What are your processes for booking an interpreter? Do your colleagues know?**



**Here are some useful videos that illustrate best practice and common mistakes and problems.**

- How to Use Interpreters Effectively - general tips and preparation advice relevant to all contexts.
- Therapists and Interpreters working together effectively
- Medical examination with an interpreter
- Working with interpreters in the community - particularly useful for professionals doing home visits - nurses, social workers, care workers, Occupational Therapists, housing officers
- Interviewing children with an interpreter - particularly relevant for forensic/police interviews
- Working with Telephonic interpreters
- Using a BSL interpreter in an educational setting
- Explaining the role of the interpreter
- Working with interpreters in a mental health setting