



SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS

It is best practice to use a professional interpreter where possible. Using family members or friends as interpreter's can lead to many problems:

- There can be issues with confidentiality
- There may be inaccurate translation
- It can be difficult for adults to be neutral and objective in the session.
- Children may be placed in a position of unacceptable strain, and may be exposed to issues, which are inappropriate

Professional interpreters are expected to be able to:

- Interpret objectively all thoughts and views verbally expressed by the SLT and client
- Assist and facilitate communication
- Ensure they understand your service, and your role within the service

NOTE

Be cautious about using formal assessments; be sure that you know what they will tell you. Most assessments are not standardised on a bi/multilingual population. (The British Picture Vocabulary Scales is an assessment that is standardised). Tests looking at syntax may not translate well. It is important to discuss word order and vocabulary with the interpreter.

It is important to consider factors about male or female interpreters. For some children it may not be culturally appropriate to have an interpreter of the opposite gender. Check with the family to be sure.

Always check that the interpreter is able to speak and understand the same dialect as the child/family. Country of origins and dialects can vary. Be sure to request an interpreter for the correct language and dialect.

PRE-SESSION

It is worth checking that both the client and interpreter will be attending. It can be helpful if the interpreter can ring the client the day before to confirm arrangements of time, venue, and attendance.

Extra time should be allocated when using an interpreter in any session.

Inform the client that an interpreter has been booked. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, a client will resent the presence of an interpreter even though you thought there was agreement on the need for an interpreter to be present. This will need to be addressed before the session can continue.

It is helpful to allow extra time to meet with the interpreter before the first appointment to clarify issues regarding the practicalities of interpreting.

It is important not to discuss the content of the case in detail with the interpreter so s/he remains as impartial as possible and confidentiality is respected. It is important to give general details e.g. sex, age and who is attending the appointment.

Establish that the interpreter is able to speak the same dialect as the client.

An interpreter can give information about culture, religious beliefs and customs, or language and dialects. You may want to ask advice on the cultural implications of using particular play, or assessment material.

Explain to the interpreter what s/he will be required to do in the session. E.g. what is the nature of the session: assessment, therapy, advice, preparing to give a parent detail about their child's difficulty/diagnosis.

If an assessment is going to take place run through this with the interpreter. Rehearse and prepare instructions. The SLT should allow extra time to explain what assessment tasks s/he may be using. E.g. Using the Derbyshire Language Scheme and delivering a 3 word level instruction. Ensure the interpreter knows not to repeat the instruction or break it down into smaller chunks.

Ensure the interpreter is aware of the meaning of technical terms. It is important that this is clarified.

Make sure that the interpreter knows you want all interactions translated, including those between the parent and child or parent and other family member/friend, or additional comments addressed to the interpreter.

The seating needs to be arranged for the most direct communication between you and the client. The interpreter may be required to sit on the floor and play with the child. Discuss the cultural appropriateness of seating with the interpreter. Warn the interpreter that they may be asked to play with the child and check the interpreter is comfortable with this.

DURING THE SESSION

The interpreter is essential in the smooth exchange of information between the client and SLT. The skilled interpreter will know to interpret clearly and effectively.

Despite interpreters being asked before the session to interpret everything, they sometimes stop doing it in the session, if the client seems as though they understand English well. If this occurs, the SLT should remind the interpreter

during the session that s/he needs to continue interpreting everything to ensure the client understands all the information exchanged.

Address the client not the interpreter. Talk in the 2nd person rather than the 3rd person e.g. "What do you think about his talking?" rather than "What does she think about his talking?"

Make sure you are looking at the person to whom you are directing your message. Do not look at the interpreter. This may feel uncomfortable at first and needs practice.

Try to use words, which are easily translated. Avoid ambiguous or complex language. Use short sentences. If appropriate explain the purpose of the questions asked.

Use a moderate speed to help the interpreter re-call what you have said. Constantly monitor your rate of speech. Encourage the interpreter to reduce his/her pace of speech. Ensure the pace of the session is appropriate for both parties to comprehend.

Check assumptions and clarify language. Avoid colloquial expression, which might be difficult to translate. Summarise and check what has been understood.

The client may speak too quickly, or for too long; this may make it difficult for the interpreter to translate everything that has been said. Sometimes interpreters in this situation will summarise what the parent has said. This may exclude the therapist and undermine his/her confidence in the information s/he is receiving. These issues need to be addressed if you are to be able to work successfully with your client/s.

It is important that the interpreter is told not to change, repeat, break down or add words.

If the SLT is interviewing a client, (e.g. taking a case history) the interpreter should translate exactly what has been said by both parties, (SLT & client). If this is unclear always clarify.

Ensure that the interpreter informs the SLT about any difficulties in translating certain words, e.g. 'autism'.

Interpreting for an assessment is a highly skilled task. It is important to discuss with the interpreter the skills that will be required.

The SLT needs to assess in detail the words and sentences the client understands without any other support. Therefore during an assessment of language the interpreter should be advised to copy what the SLT says, but not use any other means to communicate. Explain that the interpreter should resist the intuitive temptation to help the client express him/herself. Explain this first step is important to see what the client can do without help.

The interpreter should be asked not to look or point to the object.

The interpreter should be asked not to break down instructions into chunks. This can be practiced before the assessment to ensure appropriate exchange of information.

If the interpreter is asked to copy what a client says, copy exactly what is heard. The interpreter needs to be made aware that h/she must interpret everything even if it does not make sense, if the grammar is incorrect, or the speech is not clear.

If the client comprehends English (at any level), and you are assessing the client's other language, it is important to prepare written instructions to be interpreted, so that the client does not have a cue from the English model previously heard. This would compromise assessment validity.

CONCLUDING THE SESSION

Check with the client that they have understood everything.

Allow the client to ask supplementary questions or seek clarification.

Any non-verbal/observations should be fed back.

Make any necessary follow up sessions and then confirm this with the interpreter.

If the session has been traumatic offer the interpreter support if appropriate and notify his/her co-ordinator.