

Appendix 5

GUIDANCE ON USE OF INTERPRETERS

(a) Why use an interpreter?

The Race Relations Act 1976 and its amendment Act 2000 and the Children Act 1989 place duties on Local Authorities and others to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to provide racially, culturally and linguistically appropriate services to families and children in need.

This must normally include enabling all family members to participate fully in children in need and child protection processes in their first or preferred language.

Where a family's first language is not English, the use of an interpreter should be offered even if a family member can speak and understand some English. Their ability to use English may not be sufficient to participate fully in complex childcare matters.

Deaf people or people with a hearing impairment must also be offered an interpreter. It should not be assumed that their skills in English or oral communication are an adequate resource if their normal communication is for instance sign language.

Failure to recognise and act on the need for an interpreter could be seen as a breach of statutory duties.

In a decision about whether to use an interpreter in a given situation the following should be taken into account:

- the wishes of the service user
- the statutory requirements
- equality of service delivery

There may be circumstances where the need to safeguard a child is urgent and it is not possible to make interpreting arrangements immediately. The child's safety must always be addressed as the paramount concern but the family should be re-interviewed as soon as an interpreter can be made available.

(b) Choice of interpreter

How do you get an interpreter in Durham?

A deaf interpreter service is available through Northern Sign Family members and friends should not be used as interpreters. Interpreting is a skilled task, requiring specialist training. Moreover, the use of friends or family

compromises the independence and confidentiality of interpreting and is therefore unacceptable in the child protection context.

The interpreter should be acceptable to both the service user and the agency. The service user should be consulted about the acceptability of a named interviewer. There may be concerns for instance about gender, religion, confidentiality, and conflicts of interest.

Every effort should be made to use an interpreter who is acceptable both to the service user and to the agency.

If at all possible, the interpreting should be in the first or preferred language of the family.

Where family members differ in their first or preferred language or where there is a conflict of interest between family members or between a family member and the agency, it may be necessary to use more than one interpreter.

(c) Briefing an interpreter for a child protection meeting or interview

In child protection work, the professional who is arranging the use of an interpreter should ensure that that person is informed about the statutory framework and any specialist terminology which may be used.

It should be noted that some words and concepts are not easily translated into another language. For example, a particular language may have no straightforward translation for a concept such as sexual abuse, post-natal depression, Interim Care Order.

An interpreter may be unused to using the words for certain body parts or sexual acts, which may need to be described during an interview, or meeting.

An interpreter also needs to understand the role and powers of the worker and the purpose of the interview or meeting.

The interpreter needs to be prepared emotionally for the stressful nature of the content of child protection meeting.

The interpreter's job is to interpret, not to mediate or get involved in the case in any other way, but he/she needs this background preparation in order to be able to comprehend what is being said and to interpret as accurately as possible.

As far as possible, interviews with the family should respect cultural values and norms. Where it is necessary in the interests of the child, however these may have to be breached. For instance, it may be necessary to speak privately to family members who would not normally be interviewed. In such circumstances the interpreter needs to be clear about what is happening and why.

The interpreter may be a helpful source of practical advice about making culturally appropriate arrangements to interview family members. However, professionals should not use interpreters to gain assessment information about racial, cultural, religious and linguistic factors as they affect a particular family's lifestyle or attitudes. This is not a proper use of an interpreter and in any case, the interpreter's values and life experiences will not necessarily coincide with those of the family.

The need for confidentiality must be stressed. Interpreters must understand that they must not divulge any of the contents of a meeting or interview to any other person.

Interpreters should also be asked to inform the worker if they know personally any of the people involved in the case.

Interpreters should also be asked in advance about their own requirements during an interview or meeting e.g. breaks, water and equipment.

Any anticipated difficulties, e.g. with the behaviour of a third party, should be planned for prior to the event.

(d) What interpretation involves

Most community language interpreters will undertake consecutive interpreting i.e. they will wait until the speaker has finished before beginning to interpret. Trained interpreters may be able to undertake simultaneous interpreting i.e. interpreting at speed while the interview or meeting is in process. This can be useful where only one family member does not speak English and needs to be kept in touch with the proceedings as long as it does not hinder that person from contributing equally.

Professionally trained interpreters are also likely to use direct interpreting i.e. they will speak as if they are the person for whom they are interpreting. Community interpreters are more likely to use indirect interpreting i.e. they will preface what they interpret with she/he says. Summarising should also be done in indirect interpreting to distinguish it from full interpreting.

The role of the interpreter is to convey the meaning of everything, which is said without omission. This can be done by literal word for word translation or by the interpreter summarising each participant's contribution but both of these can be time consuming and hinder dialogue.

An alternative particularly useful in meetings, is for the interviewer/chairperson to summarise each issue as it is covered by the meeting prior to any decision being made and for the interpreter to translate this to the service user and to summarise and feed back their response.

If service users speak a little English and wish to use this, the interpreter should be used to monitor the communication and, if necessary, to clarify and correct misunderstandings.

The interpreter can also be used to explain cultural values and expectations and point out inconsistencies with and contradictions to cultural norms. This should only be done with the full knowledge and agreement of the service user.

Decisions about the way in which the interpreter will be used will depend on the interpreter's skills and training, the needs of the service user and the type of the interview or meeting.

(e) During an interview/meeting

In the introduction to an interview or meeting the method of interpreting and the role of the interpreter should be outlined. It should also be stated that no comments should be made which participants do not want to have translated.

Depending on which interpreting style is to be used, the worker or chairperson should:

- halt the interview/meeting at frequent enough intervals for the interpreting to take place.
- allow time for the interpreter to feed back the responses of the service user.
- ask the interpreter to feed back on any exchanges between family members or between the family and the interpreter.
- make it clear when the interpreter, as opposed to the service user, is being addressed and asked for a contribution to the interview/meeting. Allow time afterwards for the interpreter to summarise to the service user what has been said.
- be prepared to clarify terminology or difficult concepts in order to help the interpreter to be as accurate as possible.
- take full advantage of feedback opportunities to check for misunderstanding.
- if it is felt that any family member or the interpreter is becoming anxious, distressed or overtired, check this out and if necessary take a break.

(f) After an interview/meeting

Ask for feedback in either direction about aspects of the interpreting process and what could be learnt for the future.

Offer support and, if necessary, counselling for the interpreter if the interview/meeting has been particularly difficult or distressing.

Ensure that the interpreter is thanked and that arrangements are in place for their payment.