Hampshire County Council

Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service

Working with interpreters: guidance for school staff

When considering using an interpreter, first check with parents/carers if they are happy to work with one. Share with them the name of the interpreter you plan to use if possible, so they can let you know if using that named interpreter creates any issues for them.

Immediately before the meeting

Brief the interpreter about the purpose of the meeting, the key topics to be covered, any key terminology that will be used and any particular concerns you want to discuss. Make sure you are clear re expectations of their neutrality. The briefing will enable the interpreter to prepare themselves for the meeting and to put forward any cultural concerns that may be pertinent.

Ask the interpreter to alert you to potential cultural misunderstandings that may come up.

- Check how the interpreter would like to be introduced and introduce yourself to the interpreter.
- Be aware that many concepts you will want to express might not have any linguistic or conceptual equivalent in other languages, so it may take longer to explain these things fully to parents. Accordingly, allow additional time for meetings supported by an interpreter.
- Make sure that the room is appropriate to allow privacy.
- Set up the chairs so the interpreter will sit next to the parent/carer and slightly behind them.

At the start of the meeting

- Introduce yourself and say what your role is. Introduce the interpreter and tell parents/carers they are there to interpret only.
- Clearly state that any information the parents/carers provide in the meeting will remain confidential.

- Explain how the meeting will progress, allowing time after each short input for the interpreter to interpret what has been said.

During the meeting

- Speak directly to the parent/carer, not to the interpreter. Be aware of your own body language and eye contact (in some cultures it is disrespectful to give direct eye contact).
- Speak clearly, at even pace and try to use straightforward language.
- Break what you want to say into manageable chunks to enable the interpreter to communicate everything that has been said in the target language to parents/carers.
- Where needed, eg if you become aware that there has been a misunderstanding, restate or rephrase your point to get the correct message across or ask the interpreter to help in eliciting the information you require in a more appropriate way.
- Avoid generalisations and making assumptions.

At the end of the meeting

- Go through the key points and next steps/actions with parents/carers to ensure mutual understanding.

After the meeting

- Debrief the interpreter and identify any actions that need to be taken.
- If the interpreter is needed again, book a date for the next meeting and request the same interpreter if this seems appropriate both to you and to the parents/carers.

For interpreters

Preparation before the meeting

Make sure you disclose any conflict of interest and/or previous relationship you may have with the parents/carers.

Remember you should not take personal advantage, financial or otherwise, of information obtained in the course of your work as an interpreter.

Make sure you have checked and confirmed the following information:

- date, time, length and location of meeting (when, for how long and where it will take place)
- who will be at the meeting – names and roles
- who will lead the meeting
- the topics to be covered and any information to be gathered (inform the client of any cultural barriers/sensitivities related to the matter)
- if the family will bring anything with them eg passport, school reports etc.
- any technical language that may be involved
- seating arrangements: if possible, you should sit next to the parent/carer and a little behind them so that interpreting can be carried out inconspicuously.

During the meeting

- Introduce yourself to all present.
- Explain that you will interpret everything at the meeting and remain neutral and impartial throughout. Don’t add your own thoughts/opinions.
- Reassure the parents/carers of your professional commitment to confidentiality and inform them of any possible exceptions (eg if there are safeguarding concerns) before providing services.
- Make sure the parents/family member(s) are aware of the agenda.
- Keep it a two-way conversation.

- Interpret everything using the first person (avoid ‘he said’, ‘she said’).
- Explain culturally unfamiliar items.
- Respect the cultural sensitivities of both parties and alert the parties to any possible misunderstanding due to cultural differences or any specific terms which may cause confusion.
- Feel free to intervene to seek clarification in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

At the end of the meeting

- Ask both parties if they have any further questions.
- When the client goes through the key points and next steps/actions with parents/carers, take steps to ensure they have understood.

After the meeting

- Debrief with the client (the member of school staff).
- Arrange a further meeting if required. If needed provide your work email/telephone number, having first ensured your attendance is acceptable to both the client (member of school staff) and the parent/carer.