

TOOL: Working with interpreters

Interpreters are people who convey spoken words or sign language (Auslan) from one language into another language (translators, meanwhile, provide written translations between languages). They should be used when conveying complex or vital information. Interpreting is a skill, and professional interpreters are highly experienced. Service providers should use interpreters through telephone, video conference or on site. Qualified interpreters are certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). For further details, visit naati.com.au

Checklist

Do you:

- have a language policy?
- know what's appropriate?
- know what's legally required?
- ensure staff understand when to use an interpreter?
- ensure staff understand how to use an interpreter?
- know where to find out more information?
- know where to go for training and staff support?
- know how to obtain informed consent?

Use a professional NAATI-certified interpreter if the client, family or carer:

- demonstrates no understanding of English when asked basic questions that relate to the context of the discussion
- responds in limited English or talks in English that is hard for you to understand
- nods or says 'yes' to all comments and questions – this might indicate a lack of understanding
- relies on family/friends to communicate on their behalf
- speaks English as a second language but is in a stressful situation, or an unfamiliar environment.



Guidelines and tips

Use professionals	<p>Engage a certified interpreter. For more information, visit naati.com.au</p> <p>Relying on bilingual colleagues to informally interpret is not always appropriate or accurate</p> <p>Be mindful of gender, cultural, religious, political and historic issues, prejudices or sensitivities when engaging an interpreter</p>
Prepare and brief your interpreter	<p>Provide your interpreter with a written text or at least an outline of what you intend to communicate</p> <p>In situations requiring specialised or technical vocabulary, also provide a glossary of terms</p>
Find out the preferred language or dialect of the client	<p>Train your staff in how to work with interpreters</p> <p>Respect the role of the interpreter and debrief after</p> <p>Ensure the client is aware of the interpreter's role</p>
Talk to the person not the interpreter	<p>Maintain eye contact, if culturally appropriate, and convey interpersonal interest non-verbally</p>
Speak slowly and clearly	<p>Articulate your words</p> <p>Be aware of your own regional accent</p>
Use standard English	<p>Avoid slang, specialised terms, jargon, idiomatic and colloquial expressions</p>
Group content	<p>Group content according to topic and make it clear when you are moving from one topic to another</p>
Limit sentence length	<p>Limit your sentences to simple short ones</p> <p>Pause every three or four sentences</p> <p>Plan your communication so that each group of sentences conveys a single topic or unit of the broader subject</p>



Be specific	<p>Use quantifiable terms</p> <p>Expressions that are vague such as 'high quality' or 'as soon as possible' can be misunderstood</p>
Use visuals	<p>Use charts, diagrams, photographs, outlines and other visual aids where possible</p> <p>Often a single picture is worth a thousand words</p>
Get feedback	<p>Carefully monitor the listener's facial expressions for signs of confusion</p> <p>Check for understanding by asking open questions</p>
Practise	<p>If possible, practise using an interpreter before having to do so</p> <p>Learning to use the skills and techniques above requires time and effort</p>
Consider the use of metaphors and the like	<p>Metaphors, analogies or literary allusions need to be familiar to your listener and commonly understood within the local cultural context</p> <p>Be mindful of the interpreter's physical and emotional state (such as tiredness, hunger, stress). These factors may have a negative impact on the quality of the translation</p> <p>When in doubt about the clarity of the message received, ask for a reverse translation. This technique is a valuable, yet non-intrusive, check on accuracy</p>

Family members or carers acting as interpreters:

The following considerations need to be kept in mind when a family member or carer presents as an interpreter:

- a bilingual family member may help a client become comfortable in interacting with a service provider
- children should **never** be used as interpreters for a variety of reasons including appropriateness of the conversation and inability to understand adult concepts or words





Multicultural NSW

- where there is any suggestion that the client is being excluded or in situations where the service provider needs to know the client understands, professional interpreters should be used
- service providers need to practise good cross-cultural skills to determine the nature of the information relationship and to assess whether the client is taking part successfully.

