



Do's and Don'ts

Good practice guidelines are included in several publications (Hertog 2001, Cushing in Tribe and Raval 2003, Sanders 2000, Baker et al 1991). The following is a list of do's and don'ts for public services providers taken from Sanders (2000).

Do:

- Familiarise yourself with interpreting services in your area: what is available? are there options? what model are they working to?
- Insist that a professional interpreter is used rather than a member of the family or a friend if you consider it to be in the best interests of the client; you may uncover crucial or sensitive information;
- Give the interpreter adequate notice of the session.
- Allow enough time for the interview.
- Indicate how long the session is likely to run.
- State the language, dialect and country of origin of the client, if possible, when booking an interpreter.
- Match the gender of interpreter and client if appropriate.
- Be aware of possible political, religious or cultural differences.
- Consider whether a significant age gap between interpreter and client might create discomfort
- Consider whether a conflict of interest might arise for the interpreter.
- Define the nature of the interview.
- Define your organisation and the role you play in it.
- Be aware of seating arrangements – a triangle with client and interpreter next to each other and facing the service provider at the apex is best.
- Be patient.
- Try to speak directly to the client rather than to the interpreter
- Look at the client. Emotions like feeling vulnerable, angry, upset, intimidated, frightened are often easily read if you take the time.
- Respect the interpreter's independence e.g. do not ask if they think the client is telling the truth.
- Think carefully before you ask questions about culture. Are you generalising inappropriately?

- Speak in clear sentences and pause often.
- Let the interpreter interrupt you if necessary. Take extra care in explaining procedures, regulations and reasons for asking sensitive questions.
- Check periodically during the interview and at the end if everything is clear.
- Be sensitive to the demands and pressures on the interpreter.
- Try to use the same interpreter for the same client in a follow-up appointment.
- Fill out the interpreter's time sheet and any other paperwork.
- Give as much feedback to interpreters and co-ordinators as possible.
- Keep a record of language need.
- Remember to flag up language need when referring clients on.
- Ensure all staff know the system for booking and working with interpreters and are aware of the need to address the issue.

Don't:

- Shout – speaking louder doesn't make a foreign language more understandable.
- Speak pidgin English – it doesn't help and can be insulting.
- Use children.
- Ask another client to interpret: it is potentially embarrassing and breaches confidentiality.
- Contact the embassy looking for interpreters: you could get the client into serious trouble.
- Ask another member of staff to interpret, unless they are qualified to do so and it has been agreed in principle.
- Use jargon or euphemisms. "Waterworks" for bladder and urinary tract can be confusing and unhelpful, so can colloquialisms, such as "pop up onto the couch".
- Make assumptions about the client, because of dress or ethnicity. Stereotyping is misleading and discriminatory.
- Ask the client why they don't learn English. This can be offensive and unhelpful, especially if you do not know about their particular circumstances.
- Be suspicious if a brief or simple sentence becomes a long and complicated one in translation, or vice versa.

Sources

- Baker, Phil et al, 1991. *Interpreters in Public Services* (Birmingham: Venture Press).
- Hertog Erik, 2001. *Aequitas Access to Justice across Language and Culture in the EU*. (Antwerp: Lessius Hogeschool)
- Sanders, Marsha, 2000. *As Good as your Word. A Guide to Community Interpreting and Translation in Public Services* (London: Maternity Alliance).
- Tribe, Rachel & Raval, Hitesh, ed., 2003. *Working with Interpreters in Mental Health* (Hove & New York: Brunner Routledge).