



Kitchener-Waterloo
Multicultural Centre

Guidelines for Working Effectively with Spoken Language Interpreters

Role of the Interpreter

To deliver, as faithfully as possible, messages transmitted between individuals who do not share a common language.

What does that mean?

- The interpreter is the *transmitter*, not the *source* of the message being communicated
- Accuracy of ALL messages (both verbal and non-verbal; side conversations; difficult words/phrases)
- NOT add, omit, distort or judge the information; not provide explanation or summary of message
- Convey the message in another language as close as possible to how the speaker uttered it
- In any interpreting situation, the interpreter is working on behalf of both parties equally

Expectations from interpreters:

- Introduce themselves to both the Service Provider (SP) and the Limited English speaking person (LESP)
- Interpret everything that is said
- Keep everything they hear or see confidential
- Take notes in order to assist with accuracy
- Deliver the messages communicated between the SP and the LESP as faithfully as possible
- Maintain impartiality
- Interrupt for clarification
- Not impose own values and assumptions
- Be respectful of all parties involved in the interpretation

The INTERPRETER will

- Be fluent in both languages and tested for proficiency
- Be trained to:
 - ❖ Adhere to Standards of Practice: Ethical Principles and Performance Expectations
 - ❖ Perform consecutive, whispered simultaneous and telephone interpreting
- Keep everything seen and heard confidential
- NOT be a family member, friend or a minor

The SERVICE PROVIDER should

- Use language and terms that the client will understand
- Ensure the client understands your role and the purpose for the encounter
- Verify the client's understanding
- Respond to a client's emotional demeanor
- Have good cross-cultural communication skills

The act of interpreting is complex and mentally demanding. In order to provide good service and ensure accuracy, the interpreter occasionally has to:

Interrupt speakers engaged in lengthy communications
Take notes in order to remember certain details
Ask for a pause

DOs

- Prepare for a lengthier session when working with an interpreter; allocate sufficient time
- If possible, provide the interpreter with handouts/resource material that will be used and, if necessary, an opportunity for the interpreter to preview audio visual aids to be used (DVDs etc.)
- Clarify the objectives of the encounter - who will be present, purpose of the session and topics to be covered
- Determine the type of interpretation: consecutive, whispered simultaneous or telephonic
- Ask if the interpreter has any questions or concerns
- Allow the interpreter to perform an introduction to you and your client/patient to clarify their role and how interpretation will be performed
- Speak directly to your client/patient, NOT to the interpreter. Position yourself in a way that promotes direct communication between the client and you
- Speak clearly, audibly and naturally and in short sentences
- **Allow the interpreter to finish** before speaking again
- **Use simple language**, avoiding jargon and idioms. Provide explanations of technical terms
- **Validate the client/patient's understanding** by asking the client/patient for a summary of what has been discussed
- **Control the interview** just as you would in a session where no interpreter is present
- **If in doubt, ask the client/patient directly**; check out your perceptions, or questions with the client/patient
- Clarification: **Interpreter may need to interrupt** if something is unclear, if their focus and concentration has been compromised or if they are being asked to do something beyond their role or duty
- If the client/patient and interpreter start talking to each other, **ask for an interpretation**
- Interpreters should be given a short **break every 60 minutes**
- **Enable the interpreter to debrief**, particularly during an emotionally charged situation

DON'Ts

- **Ask the interpreter directly to explain anything**
- **Hold the interpreter responsible** for what the client says or does
- **Ask for the interpreter's opinion or a cultural explanation**; the client/patient is the expert on their circumstances and experiences
- **Request interpreters to transport or accompany clients/patients**
- **Interrupt or cut down on your explanations to save time**
- **Ask the interpreter to give explanations** to the client/patient
- **Ask the interpreter to assist the client/patient in completing documents** without your presence due to issues of liability
- **Leave the interpreter alone with the client/patient**
- **Hold a private conversation with the interpreter** in the client/patient's presence
- **Ask the interpreter to perform any duty that is not their role or responsibility**
- **Book future appointments with the interpreter directly**; contact Interpreter Services
- **Expect the interpreter to deal with the emotional needs of the client/patient**
- **Expect the interpreter to facilitate the conversation**
- **Engage in a private or side conversation** with someone else – the interpreter will continue to interpret