

How to Work with Interpreters

Preparing the Client About Working with an Interpreter

1. Assess a client's English fluency/lack of proficiency objectively.

Does a victim speak English well enough to:

- a. Tell a story and answer questions?
- b. Listen to communications in English and understand them?
- c. Be understood by the court?
- d. Understand everyone in the court (considering regional accents, speed, etc)?

If client doesn't want an interpreter because she/he speaks some English; explain that limited English isn't enough to understand court proceedings.

2. Explain the role of the interpreter: this increases empowerment; remember the interpreter is a conduit for telling a victim's story.
3. Explain the interpretation process to the client, specifically:
 - a. The interpreter is a conduit
 - b. Speak 1-2 sentences at a time, speak clearly
 - c. The interpreter may ask you to slow down, or repeat something
 - d. Don't interrupt interpreter, let her/him finish
 - e. The interpreter will interpret everything
 - f. Don't ask the interpreter not to interpret something
 - g. Don't ask questions or raise concerns to interpreter, ask the speaker
 - h. Don't have side conversations with interpreter
4. If the advocate is going to have to interpret, explain: "I'll be in a different role, I will repeat everything that's said whether it is true or not."

Pre-Session Preparation Between Advocate & Interpreter

1. Schedule additional time for any meeting where an interpreter is needed.
2. Check with interpreter and client before interview that they do not know each other.
3. Inform the interpreter in advance about the nature of the proceeding, who is involved, special terminology or vocabulary that will be used, etc. so the interpreter is well prepared.
4. English fluency is essential for competent interpretation. Difficulty speaking and understanding English is a strong indication that the interpreter is not qualified. If you and the interpreter are having difficulty communicating in English, then you should get another interpreter.

5. Let interpreter speak briefly to LEP person to size up their communicative style and needs (i.e., 'register'); that way interpreter can make necessary adjustments to improve communication.
6. For telephonic interpretation, ask interpreter for her/his identification number.
7. For untrained community/ad hoc interpreters:
 - a. Assess if they have knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job.
 - b. Instruct them:
 - i. Do interpret everything: do not omit, edit, guess, or polish what is said
 - ii. Do ask speakers to pause, slow down, repeat, clarify
 - iii. Don't answer for the LEP person
 - iv. Don't explain, restate or answer questions to client, have side conversations or give advice, even if client asks you – interpret everything back

In the Interview

1. Speak directly to and maintain eye contact with the LEP individual.
2. Use first person.
3. Use plain English, avoid jargon, do not use acronyms.
4. Speak slowly and clearly with regular pauses.
5. Speak one sentence at a time (sentence-by-sentence interpretation may seem awkward, but a rhythm is quickly established, and the interview flows smoothly).
6. Ask one question at a time.
7. Allow the interpreter to finish interpreting before speaking again.
8. Don't allow the interpreter to answer for the LEP person.
9. Don't ask interpreter to explain, restate, or not interpret something that was said.
10. If you think the interpreter is editing, adding, subtracting, or summarizing remind the interpreter to repeat everything that is said.
11. To fill out forms or review documents, ask interpreter to provide sight translation of written materials. The interpreter should only be translating the written material verbally for the LEP person. The interpreter should not be filling out the forms for the LEP person, or answering any questions about the forms. Any questions should be directed to the advocate.
12. Cues that the interpretation is not going well are:¹
 - a. Interpretation is too short or too long.
 - b. Interpreter keeps asking for information to be repeated or clarified.
 - c. Interpreter is having side conversations with client.
 - d. Client corrects or seems to disagree with interpreter.
 - e. Client starts speaking in broken English.

13. If you're having trouble understanding the interpreter's English, ask for clarification. If you're still having problems get a different interpreter.
14. Debrief with interpreter at the end about how the interview went and any concerns; this helps all parties work better together.
15. Do not ask interpreters to:
 - a. Explain procedures, forms, or services.
 - b. Take LEP individual they are interpreting for to an office, counter, or appointment.
 - c. Console, set at ease, or reassure LEP clients to help them cope with difficult testimony or proceedings.
 - d. Provide cultural explanations or information because the interpreter 'understands' the client's culture.

Resources

1. Supreme Court of Ohio Advisory Committee on Interpreter Services. The Role of Interpreters in the Legal System. Training video for judges and new court interpreters on the use of interpreters in the courtroom.

www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/interpreterVideo.asp



*Asian Pacific Institute on
Gender-Based Violence
Interpretation
Technical Assistance &
Resource Center*

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