



How to Support Your Interpreter

Tips for good communication and promotion of ethical practices while interpreting

While not always practical or applicable for various reasons and in different situations, the below tips will help you ensure good communication during your interviews with refugee clients and applicants.

1. Introduce your interpreter.

Inform clients of the role of the interpreter and its limitations, confidentiality provisions, and allow your interpreter to explain how he or she works (signals, short sentences, etc). Check to ensure that the client or applicant can understand the interpreter

2. Familiarize your interpreter with the appointment before going in, and give them any relevant documents to study ahead of time.

The interpreter is frequently the only one who has no idea what an appointment holds for them. Understanding of context is very important for accurate interpretation.

3. Use the first person, and maintain eye contact with the client/applicant during interviews.

4. Give your interpreter a waiting area that's separate from where clients must wait.

Your interpreter needs to avoid forming relationships with clients or inadvertently hearing information that would present them with a conflict of interest or an ethical dilemma. Unless they have a dual role (IE, they are trained to gather client intake information without a need for you to be present) they avoid this by trying to keep them from being alone with clients and having them wait separately from one another.

5. Promote transparent communication.

Help your interpreter uphold this tenet of their code of ethics by avoiding side conversations and insisting that everything be interpreted so that no one in the room is left out.

6. Do not allow multiple people to talk at the same time.

7. Do not interrupt your interpreter.

Even if what has been said is not responsive to your question, allow your interpreter to finish before you continue. You may wish to request that interpreters signal the client/applicant early and often if they continually deviate from the line of questioning.

8. Avoid having private conversations with your interpreter in front of the client.

The principle of transparent communication requires that the interpreter interpret everything, but it is difficult to interpret a conversation in which one is involved. If you must address the interpreter about an issue related to their work, inform the client ahead of time.

9. Be very familiar with the interpreter code of ethics, so that you can support your interpreter in upholding them.

10. Try not to ask compound questions-just ask one question at a time.

IE, avoid this: "Are you aware that your actions have criminal consequences, and if so, are you aware that you could serve jail time if you are found guilty?"

11. Carefully pronounce names, numbers, and acronyms.

12. Speak in an appropriate register

Make sure that you are choosing language that your client can understand. Do not expect your interpreter to adjust the register of your speech for you-this would be in violation of their code of ethics.

13. Do not hurry; speak at a normal pace. Be patient with your interpreter and your client.

14. Allow time for breaks.

Interpreter fatigue is a significant factor in diminished accuracy. Your interpreter has a very demanding mental task, and is the only one in the room who will be speaking the whole time. Help them maintain accuracy by offering short breaks during appointments longer than an hour.