

TIP SHEET 2

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH INTERPRETERS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS

Working with interpreters promotes communication and helps to build a safe and respectful two-way relationship.

Interpreters work via telephone, video or on-site at your service, and there are times when each method is appropriate.

Telephone interpreting is easy to set-up and useful for brief and simple communication.

Video and face-to-face interpreting have the advantage of allowing both parties to take into account body language. For group events such as an orientation session, an onsite interpreter is able to support several families at the same time.

A qualified interpreter is trained to provide accurate interpretation whilst remaining impartial and adhering to a code of ethics. It is recommended that a qualified on-site interpreter is provided when meeting with families especially when dealing with complex and sensitive issues.

Bicultural educators play a different but complementary role to interpreters. A bicultural educator has an ongoing relationship with families and supports children's learning. Although a bicultural educator may share the same language as a family, they may not be trained interpreters. It is not recommended that bicultural educators be used as interpreters.

'Even if we have some English we are missing big gaps of understanding when you speak to us only in English.'
Parent Advisor Craigieburn Group

Choosing an interpreter

Check with the family about their preferences for interpreters including gender, ethnicity, language/dialect and any other roles that the interpreter may have in the community. In smaller communities, the interpreter may be known to the family so check with the family about this.

- Discourage the use of children, family members, friends or other untrained people as interpreters.

Before the session

- Brief the interpreter if possible to clarify:
 - » confidential nature of the appointment
 - » objectives of the session
 - » specific early years' terms that may be used
- Allow plenty of time for the meeting. It may take twice as long when working with an interpreter and the family may need extra time to feel comfortable.
- Arrange seating in a triangle formation in face-to-face interviews to facilitate communication between you, the family and the interpreter.
- Set up play activities for children in the room.
- In telephone interviews ask the family to go to a quiet and private place for the call. Indicate clearly when you have finished a sentence, by pausing to allow the interpreter to speak.



During the session

- Speak and look directly to family members and not to the interpreter.
- Explain the interpreter's role and that they are legally obliged not to disclose anything that has been said during the meeting.
- Introduce the objective of the conversation to the family.
- Be aware of body language and observe tone of voice, and pauses, especially in phone calls.
- Speak clearly and pause regularly to allow time for the interpreter to interpret.
- Check that you and the family have understood each other before moving forward to the next topic.
- Avoid jargon words or colloquialism, e.g. explain early years' terms such as 'play-based learning'.
- Allow opportunities for families to ask questions and convey their thoughts, feelings and beliefs.
- Ask families if they have anything extra they would like to ask or tell you.

After the session

- Ask the family for feedback about the session and about the interpreter, even if the family have limited English. Invite families to give extra feedback by calling later with a different phone interpreter.
- Discuss the session with the interpreter to clarify any queries or concerns that may have emerged. Confirm that the interpreter can access debriefing support via their employer.
- If positively received by the family and the service, book the same interpreters for future sessions to ensure consistency.

- Establish an ongoing relationship with interpreters who are suitable for your service.

Encouraging staff to use interpreters

Remember that using an interpreter is a skill that needs to be taught and practised by professionals.

- Support new and relief staff to update their skills in working with interpreters.
- Ask staff members who regularly work with interpreters to share their knowledge with colleagues.
- Display signs with quick tips and contact information for the interpreter service.

Useful Resources

Talking in tune: a guide to working with interpreters in schools

<http://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Resource/LandingPage?ObjectId=2650e1bd-555d-455c-a7a3-a742042d4554&SearchScope=All>

Communicating via-an-interpreter

Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health

<https://www.ceh.org.au/resource-hub/communicating-via-an-interpreter/>

Victorian Department of Education and Training

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/families/Pages/interpreter.aspx>

Reflective Practice Questions

1. Having worked with a suitable interpreter, identify the factors that made the interaction successful for you and for the family. What did you learn by speaking directly to the family rather than the interpreter?
2. How do the roles of interpreters and bicultural workers differ?

