



Module 5

Working with on-site interpreters

Why use an interpreter?

English language difficulties prevent many young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds from accessing community services, resources and supports. Everyone in Australia has the right to access community services and employing interpreters helps preserve this right. Interpreters are not just there for young people; they are also there for workers to enable them to be as effective in their practice as possible.

When is an interpreter needed?

You should employ an interpreter when the young person requests one or when you think she or he needs one. An interpreter may be needed when:

- There can be no margin for error in understanding the young person and his or her circumstances e.g., health issues.
- The young person does not speak English well and is experiencing distress or is in crisis.

A young person may not speak English well when he or she:

- is reluctant to speak, appears uncomfortable, looks for support from friends
- breaks or misses appointments
- cannot construct full sentences
- cannot paraphrase what you have said in his or her own words

Who should I use to interpret?

If you require an interpreter, it is very important that you use a trained professional rather than the family or friends of the young person. Family and friends are not trained or experienced and may not understand the importance of remaining objective, respecting confidentiality and ensuring accuracy and honesty when interpreting for the young person, especially when it comes to taboo topics such as sex and mental illness. And unlike trained professional interpreters, family and friends are not bound by the Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters Code of Ethics. Another reason why it is important to employ trained professionals is that young people may feel awkward or embarrassed discussing their issues in front of family and friends, especially personal or sensitive issues.

How do I work with an interpreter?

It is important to find out the young person's exact language or dialect before engaging the services of an interpreter. Keep in mind that it may not be possible to find a trained interpreter for all dialects, particularly those of minority groups.

Interpreters may only be able to interpret in the language/s they are fluent in so do not expect them to interpret in a similar language/s.

Given that some young people may feel uncomfortable discussing their issues with someone of the same sex, it is important to ascertain beforehand whether they would prefer a male or female interpreter.

If possible, brief the interpreter on the young person's case before the interview. You may need to ask for background information on the young person's culture but keep in mind that an interpreter cannot speak for an entire cultural group because cultural norms can differ within and between cultural groups.

Ensure you have a private place to conduct the interview and organise the seats in a circle with your seat slightly in front of the interpreter's and facing the young person. This allows the young person to look at both you and the interpreter and ensures that he or she is included in the exchanges. Keep in mind that you will need to allow extra time for interviews with CALD young people compared to Anglo-Australian young people whose first language is English.

Begin by introducing yourself and the interpreter to the young person. Inform the young person of her or his right to confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. Ensure you maintain eye contact with the young person rather than the interpreter unless you are speaking directly to the interpreter. Do not engage in a lengthy conversation with the interpreter in front of the young person unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do need to speak to the interpreter at length, ensure that the young person understands what the conversation will entail.

Speak to the young person as though there were no language barrier. For example, ask the young person "where do you live?" rather than saying to the interpreter "ask him where he lives". Avoid jargon, use simple language, focus on one point at a time and pause frequently to give the interpreter time to translate your message. Keep in mind that the interpreter may use more words than you do. This is because meaning is interpreted rather than words and this may involve using more words than you have spoken.



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It is up to you rather than the interpreter to make the young person feel comfortable. Try to develop rapport with the young person by being welcoming and friendly but avoid the use of humour because it will be difficult to translate. When the young person is speaking, direct your attention to her or him and not the interpreter. Do not look back and forth between the young person and the interpreter.

Ensure the young person clearly understands what is being said by occasionally asking him or her questions. Also allow room for the young person to ask questions. Keep an eye on the young person's non-verbal communication to obtain an overall sense of how the interview is progressing. If the young person appears relaxed, the session is probably going well.

Maintain control of the interview as you would any other interview. It is inappropriate for the interpreter to take responsibility for the interview.

Remember to allow time for the interpreter to take a break if the interview is going to be longer than 30 minutes.

When the interview has concluded, encourage the interpreter to provide feedback on the session, including his or her perceptions of how it went and any cultural issues that may have surfaced.

Where can I find an interpreter?

ABC International Pty Ltd
Translating and Interpreting Services
Direct Booking Lines: 8364 5255 or 8364 3643 (24 hour service)

Interpreting and Translating Centre (ITC)
Multicultural SA
Telephone: 8226 1990
Website: www.translate.sa.gov.au

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)
Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)
Telephone: 131 450 (24 hour service)
Website: www.immi.gov.au/tis/index.htm

Where can I find more information?

Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA)
Telephone: 8212 0085
Shop 9 Miller's Arcade
28 Hindley Street, ADELAIDE SA 5000
www.mysa.com.au

Multicultural Communities Council of SA (MCCSA)
Telephone: 8410 0300
113 Gilbert Street ADELAIDE SA 5000
www.multiwebsa.org.au

Australian Refugee Association (ARA)
Telephone: 8354 2951
304 Henley Beach Road UNDERDALE SA 5032
www.ausref.net

