



## ***Working with Interpreters: Guidelines for Front Line Workers supporting People Fleeing War and Persecution***

### ***Who is this Document for?***

This document is for any frontline worker who wants guidance on carrying out their work with the assistance of professional Interpretation services. If you have not worked with an Interpreter before, this can be daunting to begin with. These tips should help.

\*The word 'client' is used below, however this guidance can be applied to any context, e.g. school, health, Community Work.

### **Why use a Professional Interpreter?**

- To overcome language barriers and to improve health outcomes for clients, whose first language is not English.
- To aid communication and understanding between health workers and clients and vice versa.
- To help clients feel at ease, so that they can engage with health services fully.

### **Helpful Tips for Optimal Outcomes**

- 1. Evaluate whether or not you need to use an Interpreter.** This decision should always be made collaboratively with the healthcare worker and the client. Some clients have fluent English and are able to fully engage through English without the assistance of an Interpreter. For some clients this is very clear cut, for others it requires more thought. Keep in mind that even if you think your client can speak reasonably good English, that new information and unfamiliar concepts are hard to explain and understand. This is especially true for medical, psychological or other health related conversations. Using the language your client is most comfortable with ensures that what you have to say is understood clearly and questions can be clarified. Interpreters also provide important guidance to healthcare workers about cultural differences which can be a barrier to achieving good outcomes for clients. This is very important. For example, in mental health, cultural differences exist around how we speak about, think about, assess and support mental health. These differences impact how information is conveyed and how support is accessed.
- 2. Interpretation can reduce anxiety and help clients feel more empowered.** Appropriate interpretation support enables clients to talk about important, distressing or deeply personal issues that they need assistance with. Furthermore, clients who have survived and / or fled war or persecution may be very upset, understandably. Trauma will make it more difficult for them to concentrate and to communicate. Having an Interpreter to support a person's communication is really helpful. If your client is very upset, you may need to schedule another meeting to convey the information you want to. This is ok.

**3. Choosing an appropriate Interpreter :**

- Find out the client's preferred language to support their communication for your appointment. It's a good idea to ask the client if they are comfortable using an additional language as you may have difficulty finding an Interpreter in the client's first language. Check in with the client around differences in dialect; for example, not everyone who speaks Arabic is fluent in the same dialect. Make sure that you have the necessary information about your client's language and dialect to support smooth communication. If you are not sure, just ask.
- If discussing personal issues and / or where it is important to be culturally sensitive, ask your client if he/she has preferences around the gender of their Interpreter. Where possible try to meet these expectations.
- Be sensitive to the political situation that may have contributed to your client fleeing their Country and how this may be relevant to the Interpreter you work with. Depending on the specific circumstances, some clients are unlikely to trust an Interpreter from their own Country and are unlikely therefore, to engage fully in your meeting. For others, trusting someone from a neighbouring Country might be problematic. Every situation is different. Choose an Interpreter that is sensitive to the political landscape that caused the person to flee. This won't be the same for everyone, don't assume, it's ok to ask your client about their preference.

**4. Do NOT rely on children, other family members or community members to interpret for your client.** Even if it's for a short meeting, this can really limit a person's ability to share personal and sensitive information openly and honestly. It can also place young people inappropriately in a position of responsibility where as a child they are asked to assume an adult role. This can cause distress or further trauma for a young person.

**5. Allow extra time** for yourself to schedule an Interpreter and for the appointments. Allow extra time for the information you want to be communicated to be conveyed and understood.

**6. Keep it simple.** An appointment letter may not be the best way to let your client know about the meeting if they require interpretation supports. Decide on a clear way, for example, a phone-call, text and/ or WhatsApp reminder, to convey information about when, where and why you are meeting.

**7. Choose the right format.** Interpretation services are available over the phone (through a teleconference), face to face, or using a video call, where the Interpreter appears on a screen with you and your client present in real life. Think about what would work best for your client and reason for meeting. What format does your client prefer?

**8. Help build your client's trust in the Interpreter :** It can be hard for clients to trust Interpreters, especially if the person is experiencing trauma. For example, people might worry that Interpreters will talk about their private life with others. This can be especially concerning within small forcibly displaced communities. Some people might worry about the Interpreter being

shocked or judgemental about what is said. To manage this having clear guidelines for everyone involved can be helpful:

- Explain to your client what the Interpreter's job is and let your client know the parameters of confidentiality that the Interpreter works under. (Some clients may feel more comfortable if everyone signs a contract of confidentiality to ensure this).
- Let your client know that everything they say will be translated.
- No personal relationship between the Interpreter and your client is advised. For example, it is not appropriate for your client to have any contact with the Interpreter outside of your meeting, or for the Interpreter and the client to share transport to or from the meeting. It is not the Interpreters job to advocate for the client or speak on their behalf. This helps to keep clear boundaries and privacy for everyone.

**9. Allow extra time to meet with your Interpreter briefly before your meeting/session** to explain their role and the goal of your meeting. Offer clear directions to where you will be meeting. Prepare the Interpreter if they will be hearing difficult information, as they are the first person to hear this.

**10. Introductions:** Ask the Interpreter to explain briefly who they are and what they are here for at the beginning of the meeting. (See suggested script below). Explain the purpose of this meeting to your client as they may experience anxiety if they are unsure what they are meeting you for.

**11. Seating arrangements:** Ask the Interpreter to sit in a position where you can have eye contact with the person you are meeting. Look at this person when you are talking, not at the Interpreter. Feel free to move chairs around until everyone is comfortable.

**12. Communication:** Speak slowly, be direct in your language, do not use any jargon. Give the information you want to convey in small chunks. Go line by line for important information and repeat important information more than once. Check that your client has understood.

**Ask the Interpreter to translate line by line**, using the first person pronoun and translating everything you and your client says, word for word. For example, the Interpreter is asked to say, 'I feel tired' instead of, 'He says he is really tired.' This can take some getting used to for everyone, but it's important to avoid summarising your client's communication.

**13. Glean relevant cultural information from the Interpreter to improve outcomes for clients:** The Interpreter can be a very valuable source of information around cultural context which will help you to understand issues accurately and to identify appropriate ways to assist your client. If the Interpreter explains something said by your client, keep it transparent, make sure your client knows what they are explaining.

**14. Stay with your role:** It's important that the Interpreter is composed and respectful and does not judge. It is also important that the Interpreter does not offer additional advice or comfort the client, outside of what you are saying, word for word. This can be very difficult for Interpreters who are empathic, trained professionals, because it is human nature to help someone in distress. You may need to discuss this with the Interpreter.

**15. Check understanding:** Ask your client to summarise the main points of your meeting to check understanding, ask the Interpreter to write down key points in the first language.

**16. Check in with the Interpreter :** Schedule some extra time alone with the Interpreter after the meeting to allow them to discuss any potential upset from what they have heard and to clarify any information needed.

- **Try to use the same Interpreter for additional meetings (if it is working well).**

#### **Clinician Checklist**

Do I know the client's language preferences (including additional languages)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am I clear on the dialect needed and are there cultural and political considerations I should be aware of?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I checked for the client's preference around the gender of their Interpreter ?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I booked the Interpreter ?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the Interpreter and the client know where and when to meet me?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I allowed enough time to meet with the Interpreter beforehand, for the meeting itself, and for a de-brief after?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the client know we will be working with an Interpreter - are they ok with this?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you discussed with the Interpreter their role in this context and the importance of confidentiality?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Example of an Introduction Script for Interpreters:

*My name is ..... and I work as an Interpreter. It is my job to help your understanding of what is being discussed and I will interpret everything that is said in the session today. Please do not say anything to me that you do not want to be interpreted. It is my job to repeat everything said word for word. I have to follow rules in my work to make sure that your privacy is protected. The most important rule for you to remember is that I am not allowed to share the information I hear from you outside of this room, or with anyone else but (insert clinician's name). I am not here to have an opinion or to judge what you say today. I have heard many personal stories as part of my work and my only job is to support your communication. I am not allowed to have personal contact with you outside of our time here. I'm also not allowed to speak for you outside of an interpreting session.*

*Do you have any questions about this before we start?*