

WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Choose the interpreter carefully

- Think about the content of the interview. How important is it that the interpreter has knowledge and previous experience in your particular field of work. When we think about school issues and mental health concerns that may come up in an interview of a child or a parent, we need to know that our interpreter is able to handle the information and have the correct language skills to be proficient in the interpreting.
- What language/ dialect does the interpreter need to have in order to effectively interpret?
- Become knowledgeable about the history and the culture of the interviewee and choose an interpreter with that in mind. For example: In Somalia, the Somali Bantus have historically been persecuted by the Somali's. Hiring a Somali to interpret for a Somali Bantu might pose a barrier to effective communication and may create an unintended stressor for the interviewee.
- Think about other cultural factors of the interviewee. Will the age of the interpreter matter? Might the gender of the interpreter negatively influence the interview because of gender roles in the interviewee's specific culture?

Choose the Setting Carefully

- Can the setting help to minimize stress and anxiety of the interviewee (i.e. decrease transportation burdens, minimize anxiety produced by meeting "in the principal's office")
- Effective interpreting requires a quiet setting. Can background noise be shut out... so everyone can concentrate
- Choose a setting with moveable furniture so that the interpreter can set up the room for the best results.

Distribute Materials Early

- Make sure of any information needed for use in the interview or as a background reading is given out in plenty of time in the appropriate language format (school handbook, disciplinary procedures). An interpreter's job is not to translate documents. That is the job of a translator. Make certain that you leave plenty of time before a meeting for materials to be appropriately translated for the interviewee.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Speak directly to the client: "How are you today?" rather than saying to the interpreter, "Ask her how she is today."
- Take the time to explain confidentiality and assure the interviewee that you and the interpreter will keep things strictly confidential. This is critical, especially in a small community where it is certainly possible that the interpreter is a part of the client's own community.
- Assure the interviewee that the interpreter is only there to interpret and explain how decisions will be made.
- Take the time up front to explain the structure and procedure of the interview so that the interviewee knows what to expect.
- Be precise and try not to string questions together. For example, "Do you smoke, drink or take drugs?" should be three separate questions. Speak in manageable chunks.
- Make sure that you allow time for the interpreter to process your information and to convey it to the client. Do not interrupt unless necessary. Do not let more than one person speak at one time so that the interpreter can keep up.
- Ask questions to check that the interviewee has understood what you have said. Especially do this in situations where the interpreter seems to say much less than you or the interviewee did.

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

- Give the client the opportunity to ask for clarification of anything s/he has not understood and to say how she feels about the interview.
- Summarize what has been discussed and decided in the meeting
- Ask if there is anything else s/he wants to know or ask.
- Plan another interview if necessary.
- If the interview went well, arrange for the same interpreter to be present at the next interview with the client. Working with the same interpreter can allow a close working relationship to develop.