

# BEST PRACTICES: WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER



## Introduce yourself to the interpreter.

Determine the interpreter's level of English proficiency and professional training and request that the interpreter interpret everything into the first person (to avoid "he said, she said").

**Share before the conference.** Give the interpreter an overview of the information that will be shared and the agenda for the meeting. This is also a time to share any technical terms that may be used, if the information may be highly sensitive, or if the meeting may be intense or raise emotions.

**Acknowledge the interpreter as a professional** in communication. Respect his or her role.

During the meeting, **speak directly to the parent**, not to the interpreter.

**Speak at an even pace in relatively short segments.** Pause so the interpreter can interpret.

Assume, and insist, that **everything** you say, everything the parent says, and everything that family members say **is interpreted**.

**Do not hold the interpreter responsible** for what the parent says or doesn't say. The interpreter is the medium, not the source, of the message. If you feel that you are not getting the type of response you were expecting, restate the question or consult with the interpreter to better understand if there is a cultural barrier that is interfering with communication.

Be aware that **many concepts you express have no linguistic or conceptual equivalent in other languages**. The interpreter may have to paint word pictures of many terms you use. This may take longer than your original speech.

If you need to ask questions that may be extremely **personal or sensitive**, explain to the parent the purpose of the information and reiterate that the information will remain confidential.

Give the interpreter time to restructure information in his/her mind and present it in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. **Speaking English does not mean thinking in English.**

**Encourage the interpreter** to ask questions and to alert you about potential cultural misunderstandings that may come up. Respect an interpreter's judgment that a particular question is culturally inappropriate and either rephrase the question or ask the interpreter's help in eliciting the information in a more appropriate way.

**Be patient.** Sharing information and providing support across a language barrier takes time. However, the time spent up front will be paid back by good rapport and clear communication that will avoid wasted time and misunderstandings



## AVOID



Highly idiomatic speech, complicated sentence structure, sentence fragments, changing your idea in the middle of a sentence, and asking multiple questions at one time.

Making assumptions or generalizations about your parent or their experiences. Common practices or beliefs in a community may not apply to everyone in that community.

Patronizing the parent. A lack of English language skills is not a reflection of low cognitive function or a lack of education. Your parent may be a teacher or a medical doctor in her own country just as easily as she may be a farm worker.

Adapted from Refugee Health Technical Assistance

<https://refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/language-access/best-practices-communicating-through-an-interpreter/>

