

# Guidance on working with an interpreter

## The role of the interpreter

1. The role of the interpreter is to facilitate communication between two or more individuals where, typically, one is a service provider (such as a health visitor), and the other is a client or patient.
2. The interpreter will only translate what is being said and will not “ad-lib”. Interpreters on Herefordshire’s Language Network are not trained as advocates or counsellors. They are the communication mechanism only. Please do not ask the interpreter to ask questions of their own, or to chat with the client.
3. Don’t assume that your interpreter will be able to provide you with written translation, or that they will help your client/patient to fill in any forms. They have been instructed not to do this.
4. Don’t expect interpreters to sight translate documents which you produce at the meeting. It is much easier if you can provide these when making the booking.

## Practical considerations when using an interpreter

1. Whenever possible, **meet with the interpreter** a few minutes in advance to:
  - ask about any cultural differences, such as shaking hands, eye contact etc.
  - ask the correct pronunciation of the client’s/patient’s name
  - run through the content of the meeting
  - ask the interpreter if s/he will be doing “simultaneous” or “consecutive” interpreting (see “Definitions”). Consecutive is usually the easiest and most common type.
  - answer any questions the interpreter may have
2. Allow a longer meeting/consulting time, as all questions and answers have to be repeated by the interpreter.
3. **Keep the interpreter safe.** Never put the interpreter in a vulnerable position and **never** leave them alone with the patient/client/service user. Personal safety guidance issued by your organisation should be applied to the interpreter.
4. Allow the interpreter to **introduce him/herself** to the client/patient and explain their role. The interpreter will tell the client/patient that the interview will be kept confidential, that they will interpret everything that is said by either party, and that they themselves will remain impartial. They will also ask both parties to speak only a couple of sentences at a time, to allow for the interpreting to happen.
5. Begin with **a minute or two of light conversation** to establish a reliable, steady rhythm before getting into the business at hand. In consecutive interpreting, it’s also crucial to establish the quantity of speech in each segment before pausing for the interpreter to begin (two or three sentences is usually OK).
6. Check that the interpreter and patient speak the same **language/dialect**.
7. **Arrange the seating** so that you are facing your client, and your client is facing you. Place the interpreter physically close to both of you, but not in a position that breaks the line of sight between you and your client/patient.
8. Use **language without jargon**, and speak using small phrases at a time, allowing the interpreter to interpret accurately without forgetting what has been said.

9. Interpreters with Herefordshire Language Network know that **they can intervene** in the conversation in the following circumstances:
  - to ask for clarification
  - to point out that a party may not have understood something
  - to alert the parties to a possible missed cultural inference
  - to ask either party to slow down or pause to enable accurate interpreting
10. **Keep it slow.** Stop if you think that anyone is unclear, or mistakes may have been made, and slow the pace even more. Don't push the limits of the interpreter and keep the pace comfortable and reliable.
11. Always **address your questions directly to the client/patient** rather than to the interpreter, eg. 'Do you....?' Rather than 'Does she.....?'.
12. Remember that **the client/patient is the focus** of the consultation, not the interpreter, even when the interpreter is speaking.
13. Remember that you, the service provider, are leading on the appointment and must **manage the meeting** – not the interpreter.
14. **If the meeting involves several people** (eg. a social care conference), it is important that the meeting is chaired assertively, so as to allow the interpreter time to interpret everything that is said by anyone in the meeting. Only one person should be allowed to speak at a time to allow the interpreting to happen.
15. If there's a medical examination, **respect the patient's privacy**, but allow the interpreter to be within easy hearing distance, eg. on the other side of a curtain.
16. It is allowed for an interpreter with the Herefordshire Language Network to **stop an interview** or to leave an interview if:
  - they feel threatened or are being verbally abused by any other party
  - they know the client/patient, and the parties agree that it would be better to find an alternative interpreter
  - they are unable to understand either client or service provider due to dialect or accent
17. If possible, **allow time after the meeting/consultation** to discuss any issues you may have been unsure of with the interpreter eg. "She wouldn't make eye contact with me, was there any reason for that?". However do not expect the interpreter to give you their personal opinion about the meeting/consultation or the client – our interpreters are asked to remain impartial at all times.
18. Remember to **thank the interpreter** for their part in the consultation, and respect their professionalism.
19. Please **sign their timesheet!**

## Definitions

**Consecutive Interpreting** (most likely to be used in Herefordshire public services).

The interpreter waits until you have completed a segment of speech and then interprets while you pause and your client listens.

**Simultaneous Interpreting**

The interpreter interprets and speaks at the same time as you speak. This can allow multi-lingual events to flow smoothly and quickly. Simultaneous interpreters are sometimes called UN-style interpreters, conference interpreters or simultaneous translators.

**Whispered Interpreting**

This less formal method is used when the meeting is taking place in one language (English, for example) and one or two delegates speak a different language. The interpreter sits beside the delegate and whispers the interpretation to him/her during the meeting.

### References:

[http://www.medev.ac.uk/docs/cathy\\_jackson\\_consulting\\_interpreter/CJackson\\_Consulting\\_0605.pdf](http://www.medev.ac.uk/docs/cathy_jackson_consulting_interpreter/CJackson_Consulting_0605.pdf)  
[http://www.justicewomen.com/help\\_interpreter.html](http://www.justicewomen.com/help_interpreter.html)