

INTERPRETER GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Working With Interpreters

Selecting an interpreter & scheduling the meeting:

- Before selecting an interpreter, know the country your client comes from and the language(s) they speak. Be sensitive to any religious or cultural preferences.
- It is generally not a good idea to ask friends or family members, particularly minor children, to interpret for clients. Our programs are complex and it may be difficult for them to understand the technical terminology and interpret it correctly. Additionally, our clients are often in emotionally challenging situations and it may be difficult for the friend or family member to remain neutral.
- There are a number of professional interpreting services from which to choose. Please see the current provider list.
 - Allow extra time: an hour meeting with an English-speaking client becomes 1.5 hours when an interpreter is required.
 - Speak with the interpreter in advance of the meeting to be sure they understand the nature and basic content of the meeting.

During the meeting:

- You are in control of the meeting.
 - Introduce yourself directly to the client and let the interpreter interpret.
 - Introduce yourself to the interpreter. Thank him or her for their services and then ask them to interpret everything that is said and to use the first person.
 - Be prepared to cancel and reschedule the interview if any problem arises when the interpreter and client meet. This is rare but sometimes, for a variety of reasons, they might recognize each other and refuse to work together.
 - Face the client directly and speak directly to him or her. Arrange chairs to facilitate your communication with the client. Ask the interpreter to sit slightly behind the client so you can easily see and talk to the client.
 - Watch the client, not the interpreter, for body language or other nonverbal cues. Ask the interpreter for clarification if necessary.

- Speak slowly and clearly. Use simple language and straightforward sentences.
- Use the first person. Do not say to the interpreter, “Please ask her if...” Ask the question of the client, “Mrs. B, do you live at...”
- Pause after every 1 – 3 sentences so the interpreter and client do not have to deal with a great deal of information at a time.
- Allow the interpreter to ask you or the client open-ended questions for further clarification.
- Question the interpreter if he or she seems to answer for the client. The interpreter may have interpreted for this client and already know the answer, but it is best for the client to answer.
- Ask the client to repeat important instructions to be certain they have properly understood them.
- Do not leave the interpreter alone with the client. It may place the interpreter in a difficult position if, for example, a client chooses to divulge information to the interpreter they do not want shared with the case manager.

After the meeting:

- Ask the interpreter if they have any questions or concerns.
- Let the interpreter know what went well and, if appropriate, what they might consider doing differently next time to assist you and the client.
- Share any concerns with your supervisor.

