

Staff - Here is a little
info, in case you
did not know this.
Questions? see Becky 😊

The “How-to’s” of Working Effectively with an Interpreter

A guide for professionals who use interpreters to communicate with limited English speakers

Understand the interpreter’s role. An interpreter acts as the conduit through which you can communicate with a limited English speaker. It is the interpreter’s responsibility to provide an accurate and impartial interpretation of what you say, **not** to relay information independently or perform a job function belonging to you.

Speak directly to the limited English speaker. The interpreter is not a parent, or a filter for the information. The interpreter will position himself/herself in a way which will best allow you to communicate with the limited English speaker.

Use first person when addressing a limited English speaker. Do not begin your sentences with “Tell her that...” or “Ask her if...” Use “I” and “you.”

Speak in short sentences and phrases, pausing frequently. This allows the interpreter to relay the information as accurately as possible and provides for maximum comprehension on the part of the limited English speaker.

Provide the interpreter with information ahead of time. One example where this tactic would be useful is if an interpreter will be asked to interpret complicated medical terms. Providing those terms ahead of time will allow the interpreter to supplement his/her vocabulary before the interview.

Be culturally aware. An interpreter bridges not only language barriers but also cultural and conceptual gaps. The limited English speaker with whom you are working may have a different cultural understanding of the topic to be discussed. The interpreter will work diligently during the session to ensure that both you and the limited English speaker are on the same page.

Be patient. Expect that working with a limited English speaker and interpreter will take longer than working with a patient or client who is fluent in English. Be prepared for this reality and remember that this individual should receive the same respect and level of service regardless of his/her native language and cultural background.

Developed by the participants in the Southeast Community College course “Ethics and Responsibilities in Interpreting.” October 4 – December 6, 2001 session. Instructor: Jennifer A. Gutierrez