

Good Practice Briefing for Agencies Where the Use of an Interpreter is Required

We work in partnership with agencies and organisations to ensure that we provide services that are timely, appropriate, and safe for the needs of our residents.

We recognise that for some English will not be their first language and for some they may need to communicate in other ways for example through British Sign Language. This should not be a barrier to accessing services that are available.

There may be other barriers that prevent people from accessing services for example through “cultural” constraints, isolation, a lack of a wider support network, unfamiliarity with British systems and fear of authority. These should be born in mind.

Using trained interpreters, from a reputable source e.g. in-house or an agency ensures confidentiality, prevents conflict of interest, and ensures that information is interpreted correctly.

Problems can arise from the use of family or community members, friends, and children rather than professional interpreters. They may not understand everything that is being said or the need to interpret everything that is said by the person accessing services or the professional working with an individual. Therefore there is a risk that they may summarise the information instead. They may also insert their own opinions or impose their own judgment as they interpret, and they may share information obtained with the wider family/community. Furthermore, many people will not disclose sensitive or private information to family and friends.

Using children to interpret gives rise to the same problems outlined above and may also have a negative impact on the child for many reasons, including requiring them to take on additional burdens such as decision-making responsibilities or causing anxiety concerning their parents' service needs.

In some situations, such as where abuse has taken place (e.g. Domestic Abuse or Modern Slavery) there is a risk that the person accompanying the individual accessing services is in fact the person perpetrating the abuse and therefore the real situation will not be disclosed to the professional or indeed to the ‘victim’ in respect of support that can be accessed. It may also increase the risk level to that individual.

Using trained interpreters, from a reputable source, can ensure confidentiality, safety, prevent conflict of interest, and make sure that information is interpreted correctly.

When using interpreters think of your discussions as a “normal conversation” with breaks in between what has been said so the interpreter can relay communication and interpretation to either party.