

# FACTS and TIPS



Young Dual Language Learners (Birth through 5 years)

## TOPIC #2.2: How to Use Interpreters Effectively

**FACT # 1: *It is important for service providers and practitioners to meet with interpreters before formally meeting with parents or caregivers.*** Interpreters need time to become familiar with you, your program and any terminology specific to your services (Castro, et al, 2010). Often specialized terms cannot be interpreted literally. Sometimes terminology or concepts that you wish to convey may not even exist in the other language. Interpreters need time to understand what your program or services are about so that they can formulate accurate meaning(s) for your terminology into the other language and culture. It is also important to meet with interpreters *beforehand* to review the purpose for the meeting and the expected roles and guidelines for the interpretation process (Castro, et al, 2010).

**FACT #2: *Establishing guidelines for the interpretation process can help ensure more accurate and effective communication.*** Programs might consider developing written guidelines that *explicitly* state the roles and expectations for both interpreters and participants during meetings, home visits, program visits, and the delivery of specialized services to children and families. The roles of interpreters may vary depending on differing circumstances. So it is important for programs to clearly state whether or not they expect the interpreter to assume an advocate role during the interpretation process. Whatever role expectations are stated, it should also be clear that *everything* that is said during meetings, home or program visits, and service delivery sessions is interpreted --including side conversations--so that no one is "left in the dark". Sometimes parents may need to discuss or process information with each other *privately* in order to make decisions. In this case, the interpreter should simply inform the group of what is happening and not interpret the parents' private conversation with each other.

**FACT #3: *Translation software is rarely adequate for conveying accurate information.*** Programs sometimes struggle to find translators for communicating with families and so use online translation software. Unfortunately, these programs are rarely able to convey the intended meaning of your message because they only provide "literal" translations. Words, concepts, and terminology cannot always be translated literally and retain the same meaning. For this reason, Castro, et al (2010) cautions programs to limit their use of translation software to emergency situations only when *no other alternative* exists.



### Tips for Establishing Interpretation Guidelines

- ❖ Include a clear description of the interpreter's role. For example, state your expectations that an interpreter will only interpret what is said during meetings without taking on an advocacy role. If the interpreter feels at any point that they need to advocate for the family, the interpreter should specifically state their intention for doing so and why. If the interpreter needs to step into the role of cultural mediator to explain or clarify the cultural meaning of what is being said, the interpreter should specifically state what they are doing and why. The most important thing is for the interpreter to interpret exactly what is being said to everyone present so that no one is left out of the conversation and everyone understands what is being communicated.
- ❖ Be specific about expecting interpreters to interpret *everything* that is said during meetings just as it is said without their own personal additions or deletions (however an interpreter may need

to use less or more words to accurately convey the intended meaning of participants' statements). This includes interpreting all interactions between the interpreter and family, between the service provider and interpreter, between different service providers, etc. just as they occur.

- ❖ Request that all participants refrain from engaging in unnecessary side conversations with each other during meetings or visits. Let participants know that side conversations will be interpreted! *However, also inform parents that their privacy will be respected if they need to discuss information privately between themselves at any time.* The interpreter should inform the group if this occurs and allow the parents to discuss things between themselves as needed.
- ❖ Explain participants' role in the interpretation process. This might include remembering to look at family members when speaking instead of at the interpreter as well as speaking clearly without a lot of jargon and technical terminology.
- ❖ Consider developing a glossary of common terminology that your program or specialized service providers frequently use with definitions in English *and* the targeted language. This will help ensure that terminology is consistently interpreted the same way even when your program needs to use multiple or different interpreters.



### Connecting with Families

- ❖ Understand that it is very important to talk informally for quite awhile before “getting down to business” in some cultures. It may be considered rude to immediately state your intended business without first asking how everyone in the family is doing as well as sharing something about yourself. This is often in direct contrast to the dominant Euro-American culture which places a very high value on getting to the point and getting things done as quickly as possible. Interpreters can be very helpful in establishing this cultural bridge.
- ❖ Once you are ready to begin the “meeting”, let parents know exactly how the interpretation process will work so that they feel as comfortable as possible during the meeting or visit. Make sure that everyone is properly introduced and that their role for being at the meeting or visit is clearly explained. Also, make sure parents understand the exact purpose of the meeting or visit.
- ❖ Practitioners or service providers who normally speak to the family in their home language should be clear with everyone what language they will speak when an interpreter is present at a meeting or visit. If they speak English for the purposes of the meeting, they should acknowledge this with the family and explain that the interpreter will be interpreting for them. If they choose to speak in the family's home language, the interpreter should interpret for them in English for the other participants.
- ❖ Understand that the interpretation process takes time and cannot be “speeded up”. Both languages as well as cultural nuances need to be interpreted and thoroughly explained if we want to prevent misunderstandings and miscommunications. This means that meetings or home/program visits will take longer than usual. Programs should plan accordingly.
- ❖ When conducting Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings for children with disabilities, consider offering families a videotape or audio recording of the meeting to review at their convenience. This will give families more time to absorb and understand important and often complex information about their child so that they can make more informed decisions.

## **FACTS & TIPS Topics #2.1 & #2.2**

### **How to Use Interpreters Effectively**

#### **References**

Castro, D., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2010). *New voices, nuevas voces: Guide to cultural & linguistic diversity in early childhood*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Guidelines for Working with Interpreters Using Simultaneous Equipment (for larger events):  
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/latino/general/documents/TipSheetWorkingWithInterpreters.pdf>

Nemeth, K. (2009). *Many languages, one classroom*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.

Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. (2011). *Dual language development & disorders: A handbook on bilingualism & second language learning (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.