

Before the interview

Recruiting the right interpreter

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Recruiting an interpreter can be time-consuming but is unquestionably rewarding once you have found the right person for the job. When hiring an interpreter, it is crucial to take into account the professional requirements that (s)he needs to comply with.

It is equally important to take into consideration the child's needs: the gender, nationality, religion and even community of the interpreter can have serious consequences for the child's attitude and decision as to whether or not to open up. Of course language is crucial: make sure you recruit the right interpreter with the right language combination. Languages often have different linguistic variants (regions, dialects, slangs, pidgins, 'own' etc.). Especially with LLDs (languages of lesser diffusion), it can be hard to understand which variant is needed for a child who has maybe learned to speak only one variant, especially when the child is young. If you are unsure, let the child and the interpreter check if they understand each other over the telephone (during the booking process).

The interpreter should not be seen as an obstacle by either the child or the professional(s). This is why as a professional you should make sure that the legal interpreter you are going to hire has the necessary skills, knowledge and experience. These qualifications are mandatory for two main reasons: children are vulnerable and find themselves in the highly sensitive situation of legal proceedings (be it criminal, civil or asylum proceedings or any other interview situation). It is extremely important to make sure that the legal interpreter is a professional, meaning that (s)he has had training and has had to meet professional standards through testing. Normally, you can find such professionally qualified people in a National Register from your country, as highly recommended by [EU Directive 2010/64](#). If the register contains a section with "specific expertise" or "specialization" and your interpreter has received training in working with minors, that is even better.

Avoid family members, community members, friends and lay persons in general: such people are typically not aware of professional codes of conduct (consider: confidentiality, neutrality and impartiality), have had no training in interpretation or interpretation techniques, and can seriously undermine the outcome of your interview/work.

The right interpreting mode

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There are different interpreting modes: consecutive, simultaneous and whispering (Solem 2015). In the whispering mode, the interpreter sits close to one participant and whispers the interpretation into his/her ear. When the interpreter interprets turns or segments of speech after each speaker, (s)he is performing consecutive interpretation. Depending on the length of the speech for interpretation in this mode, the interpreter may or may not take notes. Simultaneous interpretation is when the interpreter sits in a booth with a headset and microphone and (s)he interprets what the speakers say as they speak. This mode requires technical equipment and the interpreter may either be located in the same room as the interview/proceedings or somewhere else.

Whispering interpretation saves time because the interpreter interprets while the participants speak, but (s)he produces overlapping speech. Whispering creates background noise in the room which can disturb whoever is speaking. A child may therefore feel interrupted or confused and stop talking if the interpreter interprets while (s)he is speaking. In some cultures overlapping speech is also perceived as rude or as an interruption (Amato & Mack forthcoming).

Consecutive interpretation allows all participants to hear everything that is being said and interpreted but lengthens the time of the interview/proceedings because the interpreter interprets after each segment of speech produced by a speaker. This interpreting mode gives the speakers more time to plan their next turn but the interpreter must be well trained to integrate memory and notes in order to reproduce long segments of speech in another language. An untrained interpreter may tend to create overlapping speech or interrupt speakers in order to keep their turns short.

Simultaneous interpretation saves time, does not create background noise or interruptions, and allows participants to listen either to the original or the interpreted speech (though not to both). It requires technical equipment and a well-trained interpreter.

Remote interpretation is technically feasible and may help recruiting interpreters for languages of lesser diffusion who are based far away from the venue of the interview with the child. However, both the interpreter and the other professionals should all be trained before resorting to this mode (Wang 2017; Amato et al. 2018; Russo et al. 2018). In order to choose the right interpreting mode it is advisable to: discuss options with their pros and cons with the interpreter beforehand; explain to the child the different interpreting modes and, if appropriate, let the child choose.

Providing background information and materials

Once you have recruited a professional interpreter, think about giving him/her all possible background information and materials to enable him/her to prepare. Keep in mind that an interpreter - just like you - needs to prepare for his/her assignment.

Once you have recruited a professional interpreter, think about sharing with him/her all the necessary background information and materials for the interview. Do this before (s)he comes to your office. Keep in mind that a professional interpreter – just like you – needs to prepare for his/her assignment. If you plan to have a team meeting for briefing purposes, do involve the interpreter and book him/her accordingly. Before accepting the assignment, it is important for the interpreter to

have an understanding of the case (though not necessarily in detail) and to get ready in terms of terminology and mind-set. This is essential for the interpreter to be able to exclude emotional involvement: if (s)he knows what to expect, this can help him/her to remain professional and impartial when listening to and interpreting all kinds of narratives (be they sad, brutal, or cruel). An interpreter who is unable to continue working because (s)he is crying does not help the interviewing process. In addition to the details of the case, it can be helpful to communicate the emotional state of the child and possible impairments or disorders that can increase vulnerability. A professional interpreter knows how to deal with this: it is not about becoming involved but exactly the opposite: to be ready to remain neutral in all situations.

Briefing the interpreter

Briefing the interpreter is crucial: please allocate a time slot to do so before the actual interview starts. If you have a team meeting before the interview, do involve the interpreter! It will contribute towards coordinated action and better collaboration between different professionals in the best interests of the child.

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We suggest you discuss the following topics from your point of view as a professional:

- the goal of the interview,
- specificities of the interview techniques that are important for the interpreter to know,
- access (or not) to classified material,
- specific characteristics of the child (impairment, disorder, etc.),
- behaviour during the interview,
- metacommunication – agree on some signs/vocabulary to signal a problem,
- the role of the interpreter in the interview.

We suggest you discuss the following topics from your point of view as an interpreter:

- awareness of your impact on the interview (avoiding overlap and fast or unclear speech, etc.);
- interpreting mode (consecutive or simultaneous whispering);
- possible switch in interpreting mode if, during the interview, somebody does not feel comfortable (professional or child);
- code of conduct and role expectations;
- presentation of the interpreter and explanation of the reason for his/her presence (his/her role) to the child;
- dealing with critical incidents;
- the seating arrangement.