

# Effectively utilising Interpreters

## Why use an interpreter?

English language difficulties prevent many young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds from accessing community services, resources and supports. Everyone in Australia has the right to access community services and employing interpreters helps preserve this right. Interpreters are not just there for young people; they are also there for workers to enable them to be as effective in their practice as possible.

## When is an interpreter needed?

You should employ an interpreter when the young person requests one or when you think she or he needs one. An interpreter may be needed when:

- There can be no margin for error in understanding the young person and his or her circumstances e.g., health issues.
- The young person does not speak English well and is experiencing distress or is in crisis. A young person may not speak English well when he or she:
  - » *Is reluctant to speak, appears uncomfortable, looks for support from friends*
  - » *Breaks or misses appointments*
  - » *Cannot construct full sentences*
  - » *Cannot paraphrase what you have said in his or her own words*

## Who should I use to interpret?

If you require an interpreter, it is very important that you use a trained professional rather than the family or friends of the young person. Family and friends are not trained or experienced and may not understand the importance of remaining objective, respecting confidentiality and ensuring accuracy and honesty when interpreting for the young person, especially when it comes to taboo topics such as sex and mental illness. Also, unlike trained professional interpreters, family and friends are not bound by the Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters Code of Ethics. Another reason why it is important to employ trained professionals is that young people may feel awkward or embarrassed discussing their issues in front of family and friends, especially personal or sensitive issues.

## How do I access interpreting services?

There are a number of interpreting services in Australia that can provide onsite and over the phone interpreting at a cost. These are some of the most well established services:

### ABC International Pty Ltd

- Translating and Interpreting Services
- Direct Booking Lines: 8364 5255 or 8364 3643 (24 hour service)
- [www.abcmultilingua.com.au](http://www.abcmultilingua.com.au)

### Interpreting and Translating Centre (ITC)

- Department of Human Services
- Telephone: **1800 280 203**.
- Website: [www.translate.sa.gov.au](http://www.translate.sa.gov.au)

## Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

- Department of Home Affairs
- Telephone: 131 450 (24 hour service)
- Website: [www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

While there is a cost associated with interpreting services, TIS provides free interpreting services to certain professions and organisations, including: medical practitioners, pharmacies, real estate agencies, local government authorities, trade unions and parliamentarians.

Some non-government organisations are also eligible when providing case work and emergency services, where the organisation does not receive substantial government funding. For more information or to register for the free service, follow this link: [www.tisnational.gov.au/en/Agencies/Charges-and-free-services/About-the-Free-Interpreting-Service](http://www.tisnational.gov.au/en/Agencies/Charges-and-free-services/About-the-Free-Interpreting-Service)

When employing an interpreter, it is important to consider if the interpreter is certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). NAATI is the national standards and certifying authority for translators and interpreters in Australia. It is the only organisation to issue certification to practitioners who wish to work in this profession in Australia.

For more information, see [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au)

## How do I work with an interpreter?

Interpreters may be utilised over the phone, or in person. When utilising interpreters over the phone, this may be done in a three-way call with a young person, or when you and the young person are together and the interpreter is over the phone.

It is important to find out the young person's exact language or dialect before engaging the services of an interpreter. Keep in mind that it may not be possible to find a trained interpreter for all dialects, particularly those of minority groups.

Interpreters may only be able to interpret in the language/s they are fluent in so do not expect them to interpret in a similar language/s.

Given that some young people may feel uncomfortable discussing their issues with someone of the opposite sex, it is important to ascertain beforehand whether they would prefer a male or female interpreter.

If possible, brief the interpreter on the young person's case before the interview. Ensure you have a private place to conduct the interview. For onsite interpreting, organise the seats in a circle with your seat slightly in front of the interpreter's and facing the young person. This allows the young person to look at both you and the interpreter and ensures that he or she is included in the exchanges.



Keep in mind that you will need to allow extra time for interviews with CALD young people compared to Anglo-Australian young people whose first language is English.

Begin by introducing yourself and the interpreter to the young person. Inform the young person of her or his right to confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. When utilising onsite interpreters, ensure you maintain eye contact with the young person rather than the interpreter unless you are speaking directly to the interpreter. Do not engage in a lengthy conversation with the interpreter unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do need to speak to the interpreter at length, ensure that the young person understands what the conversation will entail.

Speak to the young person as though there were no language barrier. For example, ask the young person "where do you live?" rather than saying to the interpreter "ask him where he lives". Avoid jargon, use simple language, focus on one point at a time and pause frequently to give the interpreter time to translate your message. Keep in mind that the interpreter may use more words than you do. This is because meaning is interpreted rather than words and this may involve using more words than you have spoken.

It is up to you rather than the interpreter to make the young person feel comfortable. Try to develop rapport with the young person by being welcoming and friendly but avoid the use of humour because it will be difficult to translate. When the young person is speaking, direct your attention to her or him and not the interpreter. Do not look back and forth between the young person and the interpreter.

Ensure the young person clearly understands what is being said by occasionally asking him or her questions. Also allow room for the young person to ask questions. Keep an eye on

the young person's non-verbal communication to obtain an overall sense of how the interview is progressing. If the young person appears relaxed, the session is probably going well.

Maintain control of the interview as you would any other interview. It is inappropriate for the interpreter to take responsibility for the interview.

## What do I do if a young person does not want to use an interpreter?

Some young people will be reluctant to engage interpreters when discussing sensitive issues such as pregnancy, sexual health or mental health issues. This can be of particular concern for young people from new and emerging communities where there may be limited numbers of interpreters available in the state.

Although interpreters are required to maintain confidentiality, young people can feel reluctant to openly discuss sensitive issues for fear of it getting back to their community or family. There can be significant safety concerns in some instances (for example, in forced marriage cases). In these instances, it can be more appropriate to utilise an over the phone interpreter and not provide the young person's name. You can request an interpreter based interstate (when utilising a national interpreting service).

There may be times when a young person will refuse the use of an interpreter entirely. There can be many reasons for this, including those stated above, but also young people can feel embarrassed about the need to use an interpreter. They may want to practice their English or feel that their English is sufficient. This can be problematic when conversations about important topics such as health, legal or child protection issues are being discussed and there can be no margin for error.

In these instances it is important to not simply arrange an interpreter against the young person's wishes, but to engage them in an open and honest conversation about why an interpreter is needed. Provide them with the option of having an interpreter over the phone or in person, and which gender they would feel more comfortable with. Ensure that the dialect is correct, as it isn't uncommon for services to assume which language a young person speaks and this can be extremely off-putting for future sessions.



## Other tips

Young people can usually understand English a lot better than they can speak it. That means that you may not require an interpreter for short, casual conversations. It also means that it is important to be mindful of what information you disclose in front of young people if you think they cannot understand you.

Many young people find hand gestures and body language helpful in understanding what is spoken. It can be helpful to incorporate this into your conversations with them.

You do not need to speak louder when speaking to young people with limited English. Slowing your speech and keeping an even pace when talking will help them to understand you. Even when you are using an interpreter it is good practice to do this as well.

Although Google translate can be helpful in translating some words and basic sentences, it is not always an accurate way to translate written material. It is not appropriate to provide young people with written information via an automated translation service. Interpreting services can translate documents professionally if needed. The Department of Home Affairs also provides a free translating service to holders of certain visas for personal documents (such as marriage certificates, birth certificates etc.). For more information see [translating.homeaffairs.gov.au](https://translating.homeaffairs.gov.au)

It is also important to be aware that not all young people are literate in their first language, so providing them with written material may not be appropriate.