

# GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS



**Foundation  
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The Victorian Foundation  
for Survivors of Torture Inc.



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The use of trained interpreters is one of the many ways schools can support trauma recovery for students and families of refugee backgrounds.

By utilising interpreters when communicating we can contribute to the following recovery goals:

- Restore safety and enhance control
- Restore secure attachments, connections to others and belonging
- Restore dignity and value

Using qualified interpreters also ensures that important messages the school needs to convey are understood. The following guidelines are produced by Kuranjang Primary School, adapted from [Talking in Tune: A guide to working with interpreters in schools](#).

## **Avoid using untrained interpreters**

- » Questions/discussion may be misinterpreted or interpreted incorrectly.
- » Families may not want to discuss particular topics in front of a relative or friend.
- » The person interpreting may answer for the parent/carer, giving their own opinion, rather than that of the parent/carer.
- » Interpreting is a difficult skill even for a child or adult who is fluent in the language.

## **Speak in meaningful chunks without jargon**

- » If possible, brief the interpreter about the purpose and content prior to the meeting, allowing opportunity to seek clarification/reformulation if needed.
- » Be mindful that interpreters may be interpreting discipline, academic, wellbeing language with which they are not familiar.
- » Address the parent/carer not the interpreter.
- » Avoid acronyms or other 'Eduspeak'.
- » Clarify difficult language.
- » Deliver the information in manageable chunks allowing breaks for the interpreter to interpret verbatim.
- » Don't forget to check on whether the parent/carer wishes to respond before moving on.



### **Ensure you have the correct language and be proactive**

- » Never assume, check the enrolment forms for spoken and preferred language. For instance, someone may be born in Myanmar/Burma but speak Karen, likewise they may speak Arabic but the type of Arabic will depend on where they are from e.g. Dinka Arabic from Southern Sudan.
- » Book an interpreter as the default position and let the parent/carer know you have done so.

### **Be sensitive to culture and gender**

- » Consider whether the gender of the interpreter matters for the issues being discussed.
- » Consider whether there are any cultural norms you need to be aware of e.g. eye contact or shaking of hands.

### **Be prepared**

- » Request an experienced interpreter when undertaking a meeting regarding sensitive information e.g. an educational assessment for a student with additional learning needs.
- » Book well in advance especially during times of high demand such as parent teacher interviews.
- » Introduce the people in the room and their roles, including the interpreter. State the purpose of the meeting.
- » Arrange the seating to allow eye contact between all parties (think three points of a triangle).

### **What to do on short notice**

- » Telephone interpreting can be used for quick communication and on short notice.
- » Have all necessary details on hand before calling the interpreter service: names, language spoken, contact details.
- » A conference call allows contact with the parent/carer and interpreter simultaneously and video conferencing can be used.
- » Telephone interpreters cannot pass on messages on behalf of the school.

**For more advice on the use of interpreting/translation services in schools visit the [Department of Education and Training's Interpreting and Translation Services](#) web page.**

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