

Suggestions for working with an interpreter

When using an interpreter, inform the person about the role of the interpreter. If interviewing a child, inform the parents, grandparents or other persons who are present about the role of the interpreter. The interpreter is acting as your agent, and that she or he will keep all information confidential. It may be necessary for the interpreter to explain why they are asking questions. Stress the importance of obtaining accurate information and try to make the person as comfortable as possible during the interview.

Even if the family speaks English as a second language, offer them the services of an interpreter, they may have minimal proficiency in English. Many times a person being interviewed will switch languages during the interview due to their lack of knowledge of the language and how to explain. There are many concepts in traditional Native languages that do not have English words to explain or express the emotions they experienced.

Using an Interpreter

- Select an interpreter who is thoroughly familiar with the interviewee's language and the slang that is often used within the reservation or Indian community.
- Brief the interpreter thoroughly on issues that may affect his or her role. For example, discuss with the interpreter before you begin the interview:
 - (a) goal of the interview,
 - (b) areas you want covered,
 - (c) need for addressing sensitive topics,
 - (d) level of competence the interpreter has in both languages,
 - (e) attitude of the interpreter toward the interviewee and possible problem areas,
 - (f) need for accurate translations.
- Stress the importance of neutrality, not reacting judgmentally to what the interviewee says or to what you say, transmitting all the information between the parties, and the confidentiality of the interview.
- With some interpreters, you may need to deal with their feelings and reactions, especially when you discuss extremely sensitive issues such as sexual matters, child sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect, homicide or rape.
- The gender of the interpreter may be an issue if there are cultural taboos against males and females discussing certain topics. This should be addressed prior to the interview with the interpreter.



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- Discuss any technical terms that may be necessary to use during the interview so that the interpreter will become familiar with them and be able to determine if there is an appropriate word in the Native language that can be used.
- Encourage the interpreter to conduct a sentence by sentence interpretation to avoid having to explain what you are asking in the middle of an interview.
- Ask the interpreter to mirror your affective tone as closely as possible.
- Avoid talking to the interpreter about the family in the presence of family members.
- Do not interrupt the interpreter while he/she is speaking with family members or victim.
- Ask the interpreter to alert you to specific translated words that might be too difficult for the interviewee to understand.
- Summarize what you have learned at appropriate points, and ask the interviewee to confirm your understanding.
- Meet with the interpreter after you complete the interview to discuss problems that he or she encountered and to review his or her performance.
- If, by chance you have to interview the person again, try to use the same interpreter, if you feel the interpreter performed adequately.
- Be aware that non-verbal communications are a potential source of communication difficulties in cross-cultural interviews.
- Work with community members to identify persons who would make appropriate interpreters. It is very important that interpreters be well respected by community members. Law enforcement and Victim Advocates would be a good resource to assist in identifying interpreters.
- It is important that you allow the interpreter to assist you in determining what types of questions are appropriate while working with Indian families. The interpreter may suggest that you delay addressing sensitive topics until such time as the person feels more comfortable in being interviewed. You may also find that the interpreter may not be willing to address sensitive topics with the elderly, or other family members. You must be respectful in this area, as you may not find an interpreter who would be willing to do this.



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- It is sometimes important that you listen to the interpreter about what should be addressed, when it should be addressed and how. If you have found an effective interpreter, they will know the protocols within the community and will assist you in properly obtaining the information that you need.
- Be patient if the interpreter must introduce themselves to the person being interviewed. It is customary that you tell who you are, who your family is and the clan/band that you belong to when doing introductions. This may take several minutes and must be conducted prior to beginning the interview.
- Avoid using children as interpreters. This is often done when dealing with elders who have grandchildren living with them or at their home when the interviewer arrives. The use of children as interpreters is typically due to a lack of planning on the part of the interviewer.

