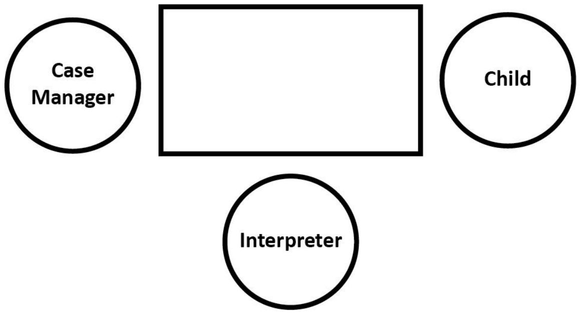
Annex 7: Guide to Working with Interpreters

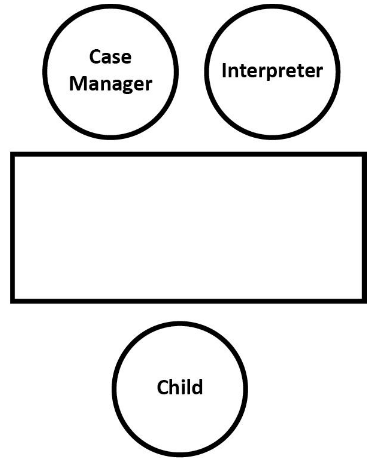
Pre interview Preparation (particularly with new interpreters and prior to intake)

- Make arrangements to book an interpreter and ensure that the interpreter is of the same gender as the child so that the child feels comfortable to share. Identify if there is any existing relationship between the child and interpreter, which may lead to a conflicting situation.
- Where possible, have a pre-session discussion with the interpreter about any cultural factors that may affect the session, but remember that interpreters should not be considered as cultural experts.
- Brief the interpreter on the overall aim of the session, and services that are provided by the organization. Review the content of the session, especially sensitive topics (e.g., mental health status or sexual conduct). This allows the interpreter time to frame the proper questions, clarify terminology, or express discomfort questioning certain topics.
- Clarify the role of the interpreter. You should explain that the interpreter is to function as a voice to repeat the questions to the client and responses from the client without giving additional information, paraphrasing, or polishing the information with professional terminology or own interpretation.
- Explain the need for precise interpretation. The interpreter should repeat the questions and responses to maintain the same meaning, tone, and register as the original message. Nothing should be omitted, and nothing should be added, unless it is only to explain a word or phrase that the person does not understand.
- Explain that the interpreter may ask for clarification of information at any time, and may encourage the client to ask questions. If the session needs to be interrupted to allow for clarification, this should be conveyed to all, so everyone is kept aware of the discussion.
- Explain and emphasize the importance of confidentiality, as most interpreters are refugees themselves and are part of the same community.
- Inform the interpreter of any materials/forms that will need to be translated verbally, where necessary.

Preparing for the Session

- Sit facing the client. Look at the client and be aware of the body language. Avoid looking at the interpreter unless you are directly addressing him/her.
- Ask the interpreter to sit near you, whilst you directly face the client. Alternatively, the interpreter sits beside you with both of you facing the client at an angle so that the eye line is in the same direction for the client.





- Remember to speak directly to the client as you would without an interpreter.
- Always use the first person e.g., “how are you feeling?” and not, (to the interpreter) “ask her how she is feeling”.
- Do not try to save time by asking the interpreter to summarise the responses.
- Be aware that it may take more words to interpret to convey the message.
- Do not let the interpreter’s presence change your role in the session. The interpreter should not conduct the session as it is not his/her role.

Introduction (see intake brief)

- Follow conventions of etiquette to show respect (e.g., stand up when the person enters, shake hands if they initiate it, use titles such as Mr. and Mrs.)
- Introduce yourself and the interpreter. Alternatively, the interpreter may introduce himself/herself.
- Make sure that the client knows you are conducting the session and understands the interpreter’s role.
- Stress that both you and the interpreter are bound by a code of ethics to maintain the confidentiality of the session.
- Explain the purpose of the session and how it will be conducted. Allow the client to ask questions and raise any concerns they may have.

Conducting the Interview

- Speak a little more slowly than usual, and in your normal speaking tone. Speaking louder does not help. Pause after two sentences to allow the interpreter to relay the message.
- Use plain English where possible. Avoid complex terminology and acronyms. Summarise periodically when complex issues are involved.

- Give the interpreter enough time to process your information and to convey it to the client. Also allow the interpreter to complete a translation before jumping in with more information or questions.
- If the client does not understand, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter's) to explain in simpler terms.
- Seek the client's permission if you need to obtain cultural information from the interpreter, if it is required. However, avoid long discussions with the interpreter. If you need to talk to the interpreter directly, then the interpreter should explain to the person about the nature of the conversation.
- Speak directly to the client and not the interpreter. Address questions to the person as "you" rather than to the interpreter as "he" or "she".
- Use short, simple sentences with fewer than sixteen basic words and ask one question at a time. Use active words rather than the passive voice (e.g. "I will ask you questions about your family" rather than "You will be asked questions about your family").
- Avoid metaphors (e.g. like a maze), colloquialisms (e.g. pull yourself up by your bootstraps), and idioms (e.g. kick the bucket) because such phrases are unlikely to have equivalents in another language.
- Avoid the subjunctive mood (e.g. verbs with could or would) because not all languages have a subjunctive mood. Use specific rather than general terms (e.g. daily rather than frequent).
- Avoid medical terminology unless the interpreter and the person receiving the health service are familiar with the equivalent term.
- When speaking or listening, mainly watch the person rather than the interpreter so that non-verbal messages can be observed. This can be accomplished by having the interpreter sit next to you and across from the person being interviewed.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication and verify its meaning in the person's culture. Be aware of your own non-verbal communication (e.g. norms for direct eye contact, touch and proximity often differ among cultures). Be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable, but do not stereotype. The best source of information on cultural appropriateness is the person being interviewed.
- Do not make comments that you do not want interpreted. The person may understand more than you realise.

After the Interview

- Check that the client has understood the key messages in your session. Ask if they have any questions.
- If the client requires another appointment, make those arrangements while the interpreter is still there.

- Thank your client and explain that you may need to have a post-appointment discussion with the interpreter. Formally end the session.
- Debrief with the interpreter if the session was emotionally taxing and clarify any questions you have arising from the session.
- Reimburse the interpreter accordingly – an hourly rate plus transport costs, where necessary.
- For continuity, ensure that you use the same interpreter for follow up interviews/sessions.