Communication Advice

Asylum Guides are required to communicate with people experiencing difficult and distressing times of their lives. On top of this, many people won’t share your language. Cross-cultural communication isn’t easy, so read on for some top tips to develop your communication skills.

Start with a simple chat

- Break the ice and start with a little chat.
- Use this to find out your client’s listening and speaking skill levels so that you can adjust your own language use, volume, tone and speed. If your client is speaking a second language, this is particularly important
- Use the 'Introduce Asylum Guides and how you can help briefing' to introduce your role and manage expectations from the outset
- Let your client speak – allow them space and time to ask questions or say they don’t understand or if they want to clarify anything
- Or even ask them some specific information about their languages (if you have the services to support them in their chosen language)
  - What is the main language you speak at home?
  - Which language do you prefer to receive written information in?
  - Which language do you prefer to receive verbal information in?
  - How do you prefer to receive information (in person, in a phone call, in a text or SMS, in a leaflet or letter…)?

Speak clearly and use simple language

- Consider if the sentence is unnecessarily long and may affect understanding. Can it be easily split and retain meaning?
- Avoid negative expressions.
- Make sentences active, so that it is clear who is doing what (e.g. ‘you may be expected to leave’ becomes ‘the Home Office may expect you to leave’).
- Make sure references to other texts / documents are clear and it is easy to find them.

Watch out for jargon and acronyms

- Explain technical terms and ordinary words with specialised meanings in plain language.
- Important to be brief
Avoid acronyms and jargon if not necessary; explain / teach them if needed for future communications or essential for understanding asylum process.

Check your written documents

- Do not assume that everyone reads English; some languages are oral and have no written form.
- Knowledge of vocabulary is context-specific and depends on experience and education. Consider explaining difficult terms in the document in more detail.
- Even if someone cannot read, they might want to show the document to someone else so give them written information anyway.
- Remember that a nod or headshake may mean something else in another culture.

Make sure your client understands

- Don’t simply ask ‘Do you understand?’ but use a prompt question to check understanding, for example:
  - When I say ‘Substantive Interview’, what do you understand?
  - We discussed taking evidence with you. What evidence could that be?

Write down key points

- If the client is literate and speaks English you could write down dates, key words they will need to learn, instructions so they can access the right support etc.
- If the client is literate and able to write in their own language, they may want to write notes and take a copy of some of the material away with them - if you can, make sure they know this!