

What You Need to Know about Interpreters

What is an Interpreter?

A sign language interpreter translates spoken language into sign language and vice-versa. Sign language involves the use of signs, body language, and facial expressions. The use of nuances may cause delay due to the time it takes to take spoken language into sign language.

Interpreter Confidentiality

Interpreters are trained professionals who follow a strict code of ethics that includes confidentiality.

- [The Illinois Supreme Court Code of Interpreter Ethics](#) states that “An interpreter must not disclose confidential communications privileged by state or federal law and other confidential information to any person. Commentary Interpreters must protect and uphold the confidentiality of all privileged information obtained during the course of their duties.”
- [The Illinois Domestic Violence Act](#), states that “the confidential nature of the communication is not waived by the presence at the time of the communication of any additional persons, including but not limited to an interpreter, to further express the interests of the domestic violence victim or by the advocate's or counselor's disclosure to such an additional person with the consent of the victim when reasonably necessary to accomplish the purpose for which the advocate or counselor is consulted.”

The bottom line is that use of an interpreter by an advocate or counselor for domestic violence services is protected by both IDVA and the Illinois Supreme Court of Ethics.

When to Use an Interpreter?

It is not appropriate to use a person who knows a few signs and phrases to provide interpreter services; that individual would not be able to provide full communication accessibility. Employees who know some signs or children of Deaf adults should never provide interpreter services.

Not all individuals with a hearing loss utilize an interpreter. The survivor needs to be asked directly how he or she wishes to communicate.

For “survival” or basic conversations, it is okay to write notes. However, for treatment, assessment, evaluation settings, and providing any type of service, it is an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirement to utilize a sign language interpreter when the person’s primary mode of communication is sign language.

Some Do's When Working With an Interpreter:

- Before a meeting begins, check to make sure lighting and seating arrangements permit good visual access. The Deaf person can assist.
- Remember that the interpreter will interpret everything that is said – even if you are talking to another person. Interpreters will also share audio information (i.e., phone ringing, sirens blaring)
- Relax and speak in an even tone and rate of speech. Do not exaggerate your pronunciation.
- Face and speak directly to the Deaf person, not the interpreter. Use phrases like: “What do you want to do?” as opposed to “Ask her what she wants to do.”
- Make sure that only one person speaks at a time in group meetings. Minimize any background noise or other distractions.
- Interpreters typically have some “down time”. Check with the interpreter to see if they need a break.
- Ask the Deaf person (privately), if they were satisfied with the interpreter's work.

Some Don'ts When Working With an Interpreter:

- Don't exaggerate your speech with an incredible slow pace or over-emphasized pronunciation.
- Don't talk with your hands or block the line of sight with anything.
- Don't expect the interpreter to be "a participant" in the meeting or situation. The interpreter is there only to facilitate communication, not to participate, give opinions, or advice.

Who is Responsible for Obtaining and Paying Interpreters?

Generally, the service provider is responsible for both arranging for and payment of the interpreter. This is outlined in Titles II & III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Facilities that receive federal funding are required to provide communication accessibility per Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Statewide Directory of Licensed Sign Language Interpreters:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/idhhc/licensure/Pages/DirectoryHome.aspx>

Envision Illinois adapted this document in 2020 from Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services' document, "What You Need to Know about Interpreters".