



Working With Professional Interpreters for Beginners

INTERPRETERS SERVE AS A TELEPHONE BETWEEN TWO PARTIES, if the interpreter doesn't make a party of three, no interpreting is being done. Interpreters, under Washington State Interpreter Code of Ethics rules and LIABILITY INSURANCE COVERAGE, may do no work EXCEPT interpreting while on assignment.

1. Interpreters always work between two people. They MAY NOT be alone with clients to “explain” something or carry messages without a third party present for which they are interpreting. Interpreters may not serve as social workers. We are not able to assume liability for such circumstances as a patient alleging an interpreter gave the wrong telephone message about medicine dosage or didn't explain a surgical procedure well.
2. Interpreters use first person address only : as if they are the voice of the person for whom they are interpreting - example:
Medical provider: How long have you had these symptoms?
Interpreter (in target language): How long have you had these symptoms?
(NOT: She wants to know how long you've had these symptoms.)

Patient: I think about three months.
Interpreter: I think about three months. ***(Not: He thinks about three months.)***
Maintain eye contact with your client – NOT the interpreter.
3. Professional interpreters *ADD NOTHING AND OMIT NOTHING*. They interpret meaning segment for meaning segment. They can't “help out” another by changing or adding to what is said. Our model is a telephone, which transmits accurately.
4. Interpreters may not discuss what they hear to anyone else. All interpreting content is CONFIDENTIAL. Please don't ask interpreters to repeat, remember, re-construct or give their opinions about conversations. Interpreters work like telephones NOT answering (recording) machines.
5. Interpreters are trained to request “another way to say it” if they do not know the meaning of a term, if it is ambiguous or highly academic in a non-academic environment.
6. If someone talks at such length that an interpreter cannot continue to simultaneously interpret or cannot consecutively interpret, they are instructed to stop the talker, NOT JUST SUMMARIZE WHAT THEY CAN REMEMBER! Please respect hand signals to STOP, and do not abuse interpreters by rushing through large amounts of material and expect interpreters to remember and “explain it all”. That's YOUR JOB! It is especially important to ask clients from other cultures if they understand.