

WORKING WITH SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Working with a client from a cultural group different than your own and who speaks a language different from your own can be an overwhelming and intimidating experience. Add in a third party (interpreter) involved in the treatment process and this can also be overwhelming and intimidating for both the clinician and client. Here are some tips to help clinicians:

Talk to the Interpreter Before and After the Session

- Before the session, take time to discuss with the interpreter what the client's preferred communication style is, if know, as well as any educational or familial communication information as this may assist the interpreter with understanding the client's communication style.
- Before the session also discuss with the interpreter what the physical set-up of the session will look like, what the purpose/goal of the session is, and any specific topics that you are planning to address. Ask any questions you may have about working with an interpreter prior to bringing the client in and inform the interpreter of any safety concerns.
- After the session, take time to discuss with the interpreter any language or communication concerns that may have arisen during the session as well as any cultural confusion that may have taken place. It is always recommended to use the same interpreter as consistently as possible for ongoing sessions.
- Avoid addressing the interpreter directly during the session as everything will be interpreted. Save any questions or comments for the pre- or post-session discussion.

Address the Deaf or Hard of Hearing Person Directly

- Always maintain eye contact with the person who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) and not with the interpreter.
- Do not speak directly to the interpreter with "tell him/her...." or "ask him/her....". Speak directly with the D/HH person.
- Speak naturally and normally. You do not need to yell, over announce, or speak at a slow pace. The interpreter will ask you to slow down or to repeat if needed.

Keep Appropriate Boundaries

- Remember that the interpreter is NOT a trained clinician and cannot provide any opinions on mental health.
- Remember that the interpreter IS a part of the treatment team and is the member that provides expertise on language and culture. Asking for information on these subjects is encouraged.

Keep In Mind

- Interpreting is a mentally and physically taxing profession so giving breaks or using multiple interpreters may be necessary, especially for any sessions that will take two or more hours.
- Working with an interpreter will take longer than direct communication. Expect to spend more time in completing tasks and expect a slight delay as the interpreter processes information and facilitates understanding between two languages and cultures.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification or to spend time checking the client's understanding to ensure information is being processed correctly by all involved.
- Acknowledging the presence of an interpreter will have an effect on the session, the building of trust and the relationship in general, and monitor this effect.



For more information,
contact the
Missouri Department of
Mental Health,
Office of Deaf Services
P.O. Box 687
1706 East Elm
Jefferson City, MO 65101
V 573-526-1857
or
VP 573-298-6764
dmh.mo.gov