



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS OF SPOKEN LANGUAGES

BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERPRETATION

FOR INTERPRETERS

PLAN & PREPARE

- If possible, **find out the names and titles** of the people attending, and how many.
- Study terminology related to the student's **disability and eligibility** categories, as well as their school level.
- Study the **Parent Rights** and get familiar with the process.
- Arrive early to **talk with school staff** about the meeting or unknown terminology.

PRE-SESSION

- Request an opportunity to do your **pre-session** for both school staff and families.
- Ask school staff to **spell out abbreviations**.
- Remind all participants of the importance of **confidentiality** and to avoid side conversations.
- Disclose your **skill limitations**, if any.
- Ensure the families understand the importance of **asking questions** and providing feedback.

DURING THE MEETING

- Ask school staff whether you should interpret **consecutively or simultaneously** and respect their preference.
- Ask questions and clarify. **Accuracy and completeness** of information are crucial.
- **Ask for an example** if a term or concept is unknown. Oftentimes, complex terminology is easier to understand through an example.

DEMONSTRATE YOUR PROFESSIONALISM

- Always use **formal language** when addressing families.
- Avoid simplifying information on your own. **Rely on school staff and families** to lead your register adjustments.
- Respect the family's wishes for their children's education. **Do not undermine their decisions**.
- Do not assume the responsibility of sight translating long and complex text (such as Parent Rights). **Demonstrate professionalism** and professional boundaries by asking school staff to summarize the information for you.

DEBRIEF

- Debrief with school staff **after the meeting**.
- **Ask for and provide feedback** to improve future special education meetings.
- If you're a school-based interpreter, ask for a copy of the special education document ahead of time. If you're a contract interpreter, ask your agency to request as much information as possible in the future.

QUICK TIPS



If you are interpreting virtually, ensure that the family has a chance to **ask questions** about the technology.



Come prepared to take notes and **learn new terminology** for your next special education meeting.



Be prepared to sight translate documents **always in the presence** and under the guidance of school staff.



Understand that the school **must protect confidentiality** and family privacy and may be able to only share basic information.



Ask for a copy of the special education document **ahead of time** and bring your glossaries.





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BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERPRETATION

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS AND EDUCATORS

PLAN & PREPARE

- Ensure the interpreter selected has **received specialized training** in the field of special education.
- For meetings longer than 1 hour, **plan to have two interpreters**. Interpreting is mentally exhausting, especially when complex information such as special education terms are presented.

SHARE INFORMATION

- Send the interpreter **as much information as possible** about the meeting to help them prepare. The interpreter can benefit from knowing the disability category and school level of the student.
- Share templates of **special education forms** that are used in your school district.
- Share the **names and titles** of the staff members present with the interpreter. This will help the interpreter come prepared and plan ahead for seating arrangements for in-person sessions.

ONE-ON-ONE

- Have a conversation with the interpreter **before the meeting** to clarify terminology and cultural factors that may impede communication.
- Remember, interpreters are **not culture experts**. However, they can share valuable information about their specific experiences that may help guide you.
- **Some interpreters prefer to relay information** simultaneously (almost at the same time as you speak) or in consecutive mode (taking turns when speaking). Have a conversation with the interpreter ahead of time to select the best choice.
- **Encourage interpreters to ask questions** about terms they may not know.

ROLES & RESPONSABILITIES

- **Avoid asking interpreters** for input, suggestions, or guidance about a family's decision. A trained and professional interpreter in education will remain neutral and impartial at all times.
- **Some interpreters can read a document in English** and relay the information to the family in their language of interpretation. However, you should remain present as all questions should be directed to you and not the interpreter.
- **Teach Back**. Make sure the family understands the information by asking them to tell you, in their own words and through the interpreter, what is heard.
- Notice **non-verbal cues** from the family or the interpreter that may reflect that they are not understanding or need clarification.

QUICK TIPS



Remember that trained professional interpreters must follow a **national code of ethics and standards of practice**.



If you are bilingual, **meet with the interpreter prior** to starting the meeting to understand the expectations of who will interpret when.



Meetings with an interpreter **will take longer**. Plan accordingly and inform the team of teachers present.



Avoid underestimating the **family's level of education** and knowledge about special education.



Use a **respectful and formal style** to address the family.



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