



Fact sheet 5 - Can family and friends provide Interpreting Services?

This guide is for use by service providers when assessing if it is appropriate for family members and friends to provide interpreting services.

Can family members and friends provide interpreting services?

There may be instances where, for practical reasons, a client's family member, friend or carer may be asked to interpret simple messages, such as where and when an appointment has been scheduled.

Where information is complex, technical or sensitive, it is **strongly discouraged to rely on a client's family, friend or carer to provide interpreting**. This can have serious consequences:

- filtering of information
- breach of privacy and confidentiality
- possible misinterpretation of information
- lack of understanding of subject matter or specialised terminology
- using information for private advantage or gain
- discomfort or embarrassment felt by the client in discussing personal matters
- where topic or context is traumatic, vicarious trauma to the person interpreting.

Example of filtering:

Doctor to patient: "I suggest a Pap test to rule out cervical cancer."

Patient's daughter interprets to her mother: "The doctor wants to do some tests, Mum."

In this scenario, the patient does not receive the doctor's full message.

As a result, they have not had an opportunity to ask questions about the procedure and not given informed consent.

Example of not understanding specialised terminology:

Nurse to patient: “You should fast for one day before the operation”, meaning the patient should have no food for 24 hours.

Patient’s friend interprets fasting in the context of Ramadan (where devotees fast between dawn and sunset), and interprets, “the day before your operation, you should wait until after sunset to eat dinner.”

In this example, the patient’s friend is not familiar with the medical term ‘fasting’ and so misinterprets the instruction from the nurse.

As a result, the patient is placed at risk.

Children under 18 years of age are not appropriate interpreters

A child **should not** be asked to interpret in any context because:

- they almost certainly do not have the required interpreting skills
- the process can seriously distort power and authority relationships within a family
- the parent or service provider may not be able to disclose all the information due to protecting the child from information that is not age appropriate.

A role for support persons

Clients may bring a family member, friend, carer or a support person, to any appointment for advocacy or support.

Be aware that, even in a support role, having a family member or friend present may create a conflict of interest (refer to Fact sheet 7: Using interpreting services - conflict of interest).

Supporting resources

This document is part of a series of resources available to other South Australian Government agencies when developing their interpreting and translating policies.

DPC Interpreting and Translating Policy

South Australian Interpreting and Translating Policy for Migrant and Non-Verbal (Sign) Languages

Fact sheets

Fact sheet 1: Using interpreting services – a guide for service providers

Fact sheet 2: Using translating services for written materials

Fact sheet 3: Language list by country and place

Fact sheet 4: Deciding when to use an interpreting service

Fact sheet 5: Can family and friends provide interpreting services?

Fact sheet 6: Role of bilingual staff in your organisation

Fact sheet 7: Using interpreting services: conflict of interest

Fact sheet 8: Interpreting services: your rights and responsibilities

You can access all of the interpreting and translating resources on the [Department of the Premier and Cabinet website](#).

For more information:

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