



Tips for Working with Sign Language Interpreters

Working with sign language interpreters may be a new experience for you. The following list has been compiled to familiarize you with the process of working with interpreters.

Ensure that any sign language interpreter you hire is licensed and qualified for the assignment.

- Ask for North Carolina interpreter license and make a copy for your record.
- Due to impartiality, family and friends generally are not qualified to interpret assignments.

Upon arrival, the sign language interpreter(s) seek out the contact person and the Deaf individual for instructions and to discuss logistics.

- Clarify any unique vocabulary such as acronyms, technical terms, seating arrangements, lighting, and other needs

Be aware of lighting and backgrounds.

- If lights will be turned off or dimmed (for viewing overhead projections), the interpreter needs to be visible.
- Backgrounds that are too “busy” are stressful for those dependent on visual messages. Solid backgrounds without bright light are helpful.

Interpreters should be in the Deaf individual’s line of sight.

- Reserve seats (as appropriate) for the Deaf individual where there is a clear view of both the speaker and the interpreter. Also make sure traffic in front of the interpreter is kept to a minimum.
- Be sure to ask the interpreter and the Deaf individual for feedback about where the interpreter should be.

Understand that the interpreter will interpret all communication that occurs including all environmental sounds such as pagers, telephone conversations, etc.

- Do not ask the interpreter to censor any portion of the conversation.

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Speak directly to the Deaf individual (not the interpreter).

- Avoid directing comments to the interpreter (i.e. “Tell him...” or “Ask her...”)
- Maintain eye contact with the Deaf individual. (The Deaf individual will be looking at the interpreter in order to receive the message.)

Speak naturally.

- Speak at your normal pace. Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat information if necessary.
- Interpreters are listening for concepts and ideas, not just words, in order to render an accurate interpretation.

Allow only one individual to speak (sign) at a time.

- If you are facilitating a group meeting and will be asking people to introduce themselves, be sure to ask that they pause briefly before going to the next person.

Realize that the interpreted conversation may require more time.

- In order to have a more accurate interpretation, the message might not be instantaneous. It is helpful to wait for the interpreter to convey the message and wait for the response before talking again.
- Since the individual cannot receive more than one visual message at a time, please do not speak while also asking for the individual to read.

Avoid asking the interpreter for opinions or comments about the content of the meeting or information about the Deaf person.

- Interpreters follow a code of ethics that requires impartiality and confidentiality with all assignment related information.
- Do not assume that the interpreter has prior knowledge of the Deaf person or will be interpreting future appointments.

Sign language interpreting is physically and cognitively demanding and interpreters may require occasional breaks.

- Assignments of an hour or more in length that are technical, non-stop, or intense may require a team of interpreters.

***Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
(DSDHH)***

2301 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, NC 27699-2301

919-874-2212 V/TTY • 919-890-0859 VP • 800-851-6099 V/TTY • 919-855-6872 Fax

www.ncdhhs.gov/dsdhh