

The Right to be Understood Teaching Notes

Introduction

- Professional workers often see it as the client's responsibility to communicate, and expect them to make arrangements for this. This is not satisfactory.
- Often neither the parent nor the child is happy about the child being used as an interpreter, but they feel they have little choice.
- When clients have to depend on their children, other relatives or a friend to interpret, this can put a strain on the relationship.
- If children are kept home from school to interpret, this affects their school work.

Scene 1

- Agencies have to take into account, and work for, a multiracial society. Interpreting services are one aspect of providing decent health and social care in a multiracial society.
- Clients do not receive a fair or equal services if professionals cannot communicate with them.
- If the good will of volunteers is exploited without any efforts to achieve proper status, pay and training for a professional piece of work, this maintains interpreting as a marginalised activity. It may also delay recognition of the need for equal opportunities and the employment of bilingual workers.

Scene 2

- When children or other family members interpret, comments may not be translated or may be mistranslated. The personal involvement of children and relatives can distort the communication.
- Professionals should stop assuming that everyone speaks English, and check up as early as they can whether an interpreter will be needed.
- When people are talking in a language you don't understand, you may think you have some idea of what is happening, but will often be ignorant of key information.

Scene 3

- If community workers also provide help to other agencies as interpreters, this should be recognised in their pay, and in funding being available from other agencies to pay for their additional work.
- Good preparation for the interview is essential. Interpreters should be briefed as to what is expected of them, and both workers be able to discuss the most comfortable way of working together.
- You need to select the interpreter carefully for the interview, taking into account language and dialect, gender, age and background, etc.

Scene 4

- Preparation time between worker and interpreter is essential for the interview to go well.
- Trust needs to be built up between worker and decide on their roles in the interview.

- Sometimes workers need to be prepared to sit back while the interpreter gets to know the client. Particularly when emotional matters are being discussed, a mother tongue speaker may have a better idea of what approach to use.

Scene 5

- Check what language and cultural background the family have. Think about other factors like age, class, gender that could be important in the selection of an interpreter.
- It is better not to use children or other family members to interpret.
- If you are going to start an interview process, you must make sure clients understand your role and the reason for your enquiries, before you request information from them.

Scene 6

- Introductions are part of making contact: most people will understand when you introduce yourself directly.
- The client and interpreter may need some time to get to know each other, and find out about backgrounds. There may be some reason why the client does not trust the interpreter, for example if both are refugees but from different political groups. The client may have questions which are not part of the worker's plan.
- Workers need to be flexible about the amount of control they maintain during the interview. Key factors are the client's needs, the competence of the interpreter to handle particular kinds of discussion, and meeting the objectives of the interview.

Scene 7

- Interpreting is a difficult, skilled and complex job. Those undertaking it need training and pay which takes account of this.
- Interpreters need briefing before the interview. They cannot help effectively if they do not know what your aims are, how you intend to work, or how you may be using specialised language.

Scene 8

- The interpreter has time to get to know the client and explain her role.
- The interpreter is clear about what she is expected to do in the interview.
- When the interpreter needs to spend time in discussion with either client or worker she keeps the third person informed of what is being talked about.
- The worker conveys his interest in the discussion when the interpreter is leading the interview. He is non-intrusive but supported.
- The interpreter is moving towards acting as a bilingual advice worker. However, she is employed as a community worker. If she had taken the referral on alone she might be going outside her job description, and the advice worker would not be acquiring skills or offering a service to this group of clients.

Scene 9

- Workers should check not only what languages are spoken, but which is the preferred language for an interview.
- Even when some family members speak English, good interpretation can ensure that no meanings are left unclear

Scene 10

- Interpreting is more than just translating words.
- Interpreter and worker need to have agreed as to when interpreters may guide discussion, and when more direct interpretation is needed.
- Workers bring with them their own professional skills. When they wish to use these directly with the client, then they will need direct interpretation of their words.
- You need to take special factors into account when working with refugees, for example their political background, their experiences in their countries of origin, and their experiences as a refugees or asylum seekers here.

Scene 11

- How interviews finish is as important as how they start.
- Workers can learn from interpreters about the wider community to which the client belongs.
- While it is not the interpreter's responsibility to make an assessment of the client, their views and impressions gained in discussion will be useful.
- Post-interview discussion allows for: clarification of any issues that emerged in the interview; positive and negative feedback about how the interview went; planning for any follow-up work.

Scene 12

- If interpreters are properly briefed, they are less likely to misunderstand the worker's questions.
- Workers should try to make it clear to the interpreter if they do not want questions or discussions to be translated.
- When sensitive matters are likely to come up, it is best if worker and interpreter can anticipate this and find the best way to handle the discussion so as to avoid causing offence.

Scene 13

- It is possible to counsel and deal with emotional issues through an interpreter.
- When worker and interpreter work well together, this helps the client to trust them, and can build up good rapport between all three people.
- Sometimes clients will need to talk without pausing for translation, in order to express their feelings fully.
- You may need to check whether the interpreter or her family have had similar experiences to the client. If, for example, she has also undergone torture, racist attacks, or other bad experiences, this may affect how she deals with the interpreting situation, and she may need extra understanding and support from you.

