

# Tips for Working with Interpreters during CICT

Partnering with a professional interpreter is an important strategy when conducting case investigation and contact tracing (CICT) with community members who do not speak the same language as the CICT professional. However, there are some important considerations to keep in mind to ensure a professional and productive CICT call. This document is for CICT professionals and outlines practical tips for working with interpreters.

## Pre-Session with the Interpreter

A successfully interpreted CICT call begins with an introduction in which the interpreter's role is clearly established. Be familiar with the interpreter code of ethics, so you can support the interpreter in upholding them.

Ideally, have a pre-session with the interpreter **before** calling the case/contact. During the pre-session:

- Briefly tell the interpreter what the call will be about and any challenges you anticipate
- Review interpreter roles and expectations
- Discuss with the interpreter how they can signal to you if you're speaking for too long, too quickly, or if they need clarification (e.g., having the interpreter say "pause")
- Give the interpreter time to ask questions before beginning the call
- Provide the interpreter with a glossary of terms relevant to CICT before the call

Once you've reached the case/contact, begin by:

- Confirming that the case/contact and interpreter speak a common language (including the same dialect) and understand each other
- Describing to the case/contact the interpreter's role and its limitations
- Assuring the case/contact that the interpreter must keep the conversation confidential
- Briefly providing an overview of what the case/contact can expect during the session and how long it will last

## Do's & Don'ts for Working with Interpreters during a CICT Call

| Do   | Don't   |
|--|---|
| Speak directly to the case/contact in the 1st person (ex: "How are you feeling today?")  | Ask the interpreter to ask the case/contact questions (ex: "Can you ask him how he's feeling today?")                 |
| Speak at a normal volume and speed   | Shout   |
| Speak in short sentences   | Ask multiple questions at one time ("Have you been experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, and if so, when did they start?")  |
| Interrupt if something seems to be off in the conversation   | Ask case/contacts' relatives or friends to interpret  |
| Help the interpreter maintain professional distance by not allowing the case/contact to ask the interpreter personal questions   | Ask the interpreter to do something outside of their role   |
| Carefully pronounce names, numbers, and acronyms   | Use jargon  |
| Ask the case/contact directly for clarification including about cultural differences or gaps in understanding  | Ask the interpreter for their opinion about the case/contact or situation   |
| Be patient with the interpreter and case/contact   | Hold personal conversations with the interpreter or allow the interpreter and case/contact to have side conversations |
| Remember that you should be the one establishing a relationship with the case/contact and maintaining the conversation and the interpreter is there to interpret what you are saying |   |
| Ask the case/contact to repeat back information to ensure understanding  |   |

## Additional Tips

### Communication should be transparent

You expect the interpreter not to have side conversations because you are excluded from them; do the same for the case/contact. If you have to speak to the interpreter once the encounter has begun, advise the case/contact that you are about to talk to the interpreter, and make sure the content of your side conversation is interpreted, too.

**Never expect that the interpreter will not interpret a comment that you make. Your interpreter should interpret everything that is said on the call, regardless of the person the comment is addressed to.**

### Some languages do not have exact equivalents

The interpreter may need to speak a full sentence to convey a single word. If you suspect the interpreter is adding something to the message, ask them about it, but keep in mind that this may be the case. However, if you speak a full sentence but the interpreter says one word, you will want to check with them to confirm everything you said was interpreted.

### Allow time for breaks

Interpreter fatigue is a significant factor in diminished accuracy. The interpreter has a demanding mental task, and is the only one in the encounter who will be speaking the whole time. Short breaks are recommended for calls lasting longer than an hour.

### Learn more

If you are interested in learning more about working with interpreters, visit the [NRC-RIM training page](#) to access an accompanying training module.

**Acknowledgement:** This tip sheet was adapted from materials from the International Rescue Committee (IRC).