

# Practice Guide for Delivery of Service in a Client's Preferred Method of Communication

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## **Introduction**

Under the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) are guaranteed protection from discrimination in federally funded human services programs. The purpose of this Practice Guide is provide a framework for DCF staff as we work with children, families and other relevant persons who speak languages other than English.

Effective communication is the key to ensuring equal access to benefits and services for LEP children and families. The Office of Civil Rights guidelines state that the client should be able to:

- understand information about the services and process;
- understand the resources and services available to address the particular situation; and
- communicate with the service provider.

From a child welfare perspective, this requirement is congruent with the principles of good social service because a helping relationship depends on meaningful communication between the provider and the client.

Likewise, deaf and hard of hearing people are entitled to effective communication with state agencies. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 42 U.S.C. §§12131-12134, forbids discrimination by any public entity. Under the ADA, state agencies are required to give equal access and equally effective services to people with disabilities. 28 CFR. 35.130. A state agency may not deny people an opportunity to participate in its programs or give them an opportunity that is less effective than the opportunity given to others. Often, the agency must provide qualified interpreters, TTY machines, visible warning devices, captioned materials and other auxiliary aids ensure effective communication with deaf and hard of hearing people."

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## **Guidelines for Working with LEP clients**

In order to avoid discrimination on the grounds of national origin, all programs or activities administered by DCF must take adequate steps to ensure that its policies and procedures do not deny or have the effect of denying LEP individuals with equal access to benefits and services for which such persons qualify.

Given that not all Social Workers speak the preferred languages of their clients, DCF staff are required to utilize and incorporate interpreters when engaging LEP clients. The following guidelines are offered to facilitate better case practice with clients when interpreters are used.

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## **Acquiring the Services of an Interpreter**

The DCF Office of Multicultural Affairs maintains an updated list of State of Connecticut Department of Administrative Services approved interpreter and translation services. This list is posted on the Multicultural Affairs web page at [DCF Authorized Interpreter and Translation Services](#) and includes contact information. If an interpreter cannot be identified through one of these vendors, staff should contact the Office of Multicultural Affairs for assistance in locating a qualified interpreter or translator.

**Note:** When scheduling and working with an interpreter, it is essential that staff understand that any interaction with a client will require that the engagement time double to allow for maximum communication effectiveness. (*e.g.*, if your visit is scheduled for 30 minutes, you should expect that the visit will last for an hour). The same applies for working with an interpreter for persons that are deaf or hard of hearing (discussed below).

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## **Interpreter Preparation**

Prior to an interaction with a client that requires interpretation, time should be set aside for the preparation of the interpreter. This time should include a briefing during which the worker identifies:

- the major goals and purposes of the contact or session with the family;
  - the important points to be made as well as potentially sensitive areas that will be discussed;
  - specific terms that will be used (the interpreter might review and share corresponding word or phrase equivalents or variations in the client's language); and
  - written documents that will need to be referred to or shown to the client.
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## **Guidelines for Working with an Interpreter**

- Learn proper protocols and forms of address (including a few greetings and social phrases) in the client's primary language, the names family members wish to be called, and the correct pronunciation.
  - Introduce yourself and the interpreter, describe your respective roles, and clarify mutual expectations and the purpose of the encounter.
  - Learn basic words and sentences in the client's language and become familiar with special terminology he or she may use so you can selectively attend to him or her during interpreter-family exchanges.
  - During the interaction, address your remarks and questions directly to the family members (not to the interpreter) and look at and listen to family members as they speak and observe their nonverbal communication.
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### **Guidelines for Working with an Interpreter (continued)**

- Avoid body language or gestures that may be offensive or misunderstood.
  - Use a positive tone of voice and facial expressions that sincerely convey respect and interest in the family. Address the family in a calm, unhurried manner.
  - Speak clearly and somewhat slowly but not loudly.
  - Limit your remarks and questions to a few sentences between translations and avoid giving too much information or long complex discussions of several topics in a single session.
  - Avoid technical jargon, colloquialisms, idioms, slang and abstractions.
  - Avoid oversimplification and condensing important explanations.
  - Give instructions in a clear, logical sequence; emphasize key words or points; and offer reasons for specific recommendations.
  - Periodically check on the family’s understanding and the accuracy of the translation by asking the family to repeat instructions or whatever has been communicated in their own words, with the interpreter facilitating, but avoid literally asking, “Do you understand?”
  - When possible, reinforce verbal information with materials written in the family’s language and visual aids or behavior modeling, if appropriate. Before introducing written materials, tactfully determine the client’s literacy level through the interpreter.
  - Be patient and prepared for the additional time that will inevitably be required for careful interpretation.
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### **Guidelines for Working with Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

In your career at DCF, you may have the opportunity to work with a deaf or hard of hearing client and or family member. There are specific laws and general guidelines that should be adhered to when working with this population; the procedure, though similar to that for LEP clients, has some differences. The following are considered to be best practice standards for working with children and families who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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### **Reports to the DCF Careline**

- Identify the specific type of interpreter needed to deliver services to family, *e.g.*, ASL, English, Oral.
  - If the report requires after hours assessment or intervention, interpreter services shall be accessed through the designated Careline after hours service provider.
  - When a report is assigned to the Area Office, the Careline liaison must email notification about the report to the Area Office Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council (DHHAC) liaison.
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### Area Office Intake

- Arrange for an interpreters and consult with the Area Office DHHAC Liaison.
- Complete the [DCF-1248, "Safety Communication System for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Parents and Caregivers."](#)
- Obtain Releases of Information in accordance with DCF policy.
- Consult with Regional Office support staff (e.g., RRG) and Counseling Services staff from the [Department of Rehabilitation Services' Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Unit](#),

**Note:** The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council (DHHAC) Liaison will serve as a contact person for resources, education and services for children and families who are deaf and hard of hearing and are involved with DCF.

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### On-going Services

- It is strongly recommended that Area Offices present all open cases involving persons with hearing loss to the DHHAC for consultation. DCF liaisons maintain schedules of DHHAC meetings.
  - Upon transfer from Intake, in order to best address the needs of the child and family members, the Ongoing Services Social Worker is likewise encouraged to present the case to the DHHAC for consultation and service support.
- Inclusion of providers is strongly encouraged for all case planning meetings.

**Note:** All visits, which include home visits, court appearances and case planning meetings, must include interpreting services. Interpreting services must be provided by a certified interpreter. Certified interpreters are provided by two agencies in the State of Connecticut: the Department of Rehabilitation Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and Lifebridge Community Services Sign Language Interpreting Services.

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## **Guidelines for Requesting Sign Language Interpreters**

- Request a certified interpreter through DORS or Lifebridge Community Services Sign Language Interpreting Services.
  - Always try to obtain the individual's preferred mode of communication prior to scheduling the interpreter. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals can use a variety of communication including American Sign Language (ASL), Oral (lip reading and uses voice), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), and Signed English, Minimal Language Skills or Gestural (MLS). If you cannot determine the client's preferred mode of communication, ask him or her when the interpreter is present.
  - Try to schedule interpreting services at least ten working days in advance. A suggestion is to plan your home visits (even announced) a month in advance to ensure the availability of interpreter services. (Interpreter services are available if necessary on an emergency basis.)
  - There are different types of interpreters for different uses. Interpreters are certified nationally in different skill categories (*e.g.*, medical, legal). Some situations may require the use of more than one interpreter to ensure effective communication between all parties.
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## **Things to know about Deaf Culture**

There are many barriers to effective communication with persons who identify themselves as members of Deaf Culture which are often not apparent to you.

Try to be mindful of your body language and facial expressions and maintain eye contact with the deaf individual. When an interpreter is present, look at and speak to the individual, not the interpreter.

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## **Ways to Communicate with a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Individual**

All DCF offices have a TTY available. The keyboard is similar to a standard computer keyboard. There is TTY etiquette you need to follow. Type "GA," which means go ahead, at the end of your sentences to inform the other person it is their turn to respond. Also watch for "GA" which means it is your turn to talk. Type "SK" to end the conversation.

Call 711 for relay services. Tell the 711 operator the number you wish to call. The relay operator will dial it and then communicate using a TTY with the individual. Remember to use "GA" and "SK" just as you would when using a TTY. Please speak directly to the individual, not to the operator.

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**Ways to  
Communicate  
with a Deaf or  
Hard of  
Hearing  
Individual  
(continued)**

Some individuals use video relay. They utilize a computer equipped with a video camera and use Sign Language to communicate with an interpreter instead of a TTY. Not many people have access to this but if they do, it is very helpful for an individual with limited English who is not able to communicate with a TTY.

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**Interpreting  
Services**

**Deaf Outreach Services (DORS)** – State of Connecticut  
Department of Rehabilitation 184 Windsor Ave  
Windsor, CT 06095  
Interpreting Unit  
184 Windsor Ave  
Windsor, CT 06095  
Phone: 860-697-3570  
VP: 860-899-1674  
Fax: 860-231-8746  
After Hours Interpreting Emergencies: 888-308-9504

**Lifebridge Community Services Sign Language Interpreting  
Services**  
475 Clinton Ave.  
Bridgeport, CT 06605  
203-368-4291 TTY/Voice  
888-676-8554 Toll free and emergency

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