

Bilingual Advocate Guiding Questions

When you are asked to serve as an interpreter

These questions can be helpful in assessing whether or not to agree to provide interpretation for another organization or agency while you are working with a survivor. Every circumstance is different, so it is helpful to have a framework to use in this situation.

Most importantly, the decision ultimately rests with the survivor. In your role as advocate, you can inform the survivor of the potential consequences, the differences in the role of advocate vs. interpreter, and how serving as both advocate and interpreter at the same time will impact your ability to provide information and support.

1. *Is there a way to compel the organization/agency to make a qualified interpreter available, even if we have to wait or come back another day? What haven't I tried?*
2. *What is the survivor's wish or goal at this moment?*
 - *How critical is this service to the survivor's safety, goals or needs?*
3. *What does the survivor need or want from this service?*
4. *If I do not interpret, what might be the consequences (short- or long-term) for the survivor? Will not interpreting in this situation:*
 - *Compromise survivor safety (physical, emotional, economic, immigration, etc.)?*
5. *If I agree to interpret, what might be the consequences for the survivor? Will interpreting in this situation:*
 - *Compromise survivor confidentiality?*
 - *Open me to receiving a subpoena to act as a witness in a court case?*
6. *Does the survivor fully understand the consequences of what may happen if I act as an interpreter in this situation? Have I clearly explained that:*
 - *Our communications in this situation are no longer confidential. In the short-term, this means the other person can ask what we are talking about, if we try to discuss something between ourselves, in front of the other person. In the long-term, I could be asked to testify in a court case about this conversation. (Check your state confidentiality statutes).*
 - *I have to interpret everything – even if the other person asks inappropriate questions. And if we pause to discuss the question, I may have to tell the other person what we are saying.*
 - *I am not a trained interpreter, so I might have to summarize or miss some things.*
7. *Given the circumstances and possible consequences, what does the survivor want me to do?*

Once the decision is made, a final question may help future interaction with this organization or agency:

8. *Going forward, what can we do to prevent this from happening again?*

This question could be discussed with a representative of the agency in the moment, or could be discussed with your supervisor when you return to the office.

Check out the Systems Change section of the Language Access Toolkit at <http://nationallatinonetwork.org/lep-toolkit-changing-systems> for more ideas about how to increase language access in other organizations, agencies, or systems.