Sign Language Interpreting in Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Contexts

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Vision & Mission

Vision

Safety and freedom - not harm and punishment - for people with disabilities and Deaf people. People with disabilities and Deaf people are free from violence, thriving, and affirmed by communities and systems.



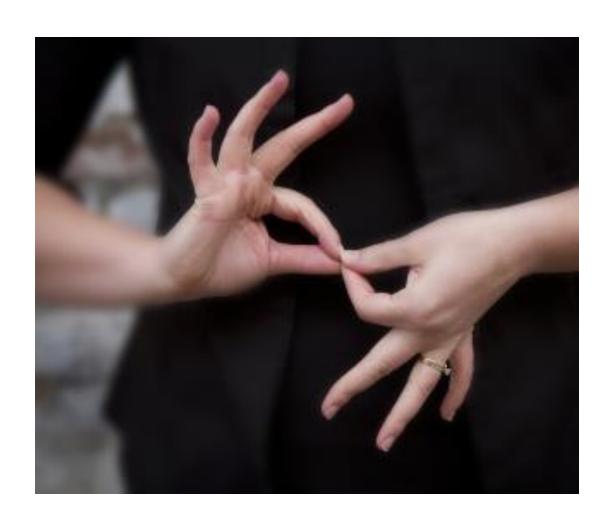
Poll

Webinar Goals

- To identify what barriers exist for Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors when accessing services and how to effectively address them
- → To learn how to advocate for effective interpreters in DV & SA contexts
- → To understand best practices for ASL interpreters and those that work with them in the context of DV and SA

Understanding the Uniqueness of Interpreting in the Context of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault: Why It Matters

Why It Matters



- Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals often face barriers accessing victim services
- Using qualified ASL interpreters can ensure safety and effective communication
- Legal and ethical obligations require meaningful access

1 in 4

Adults in the United States have a disability

People with disabilities and Deaf people experience violence at alarming rates

Common Barriers to Accessing Services for Deaf People



- → When Deaf survivors reach out for services and support: what usually happens?
- Communication and cultural barriers exist within the system because it was not specifically designed to meet Deaf survivors' needs
 - → Invisibility and isolation
 - Lack of specialized outreach by victim service providers
 - → Phone-based emergency hotlines
 - → Lack of language access
 - → Lack of cultural competency in victim services and advocacy

Deaf-Specific Language Access

- Language access for Deaf people as a distinct, unique plan
- Deaf-centered language access
- → Spoken language access principles aren't interchangeable with Deaf language access principles

How We Can Be Proactive: Language Access Planning for Deaf survivors

Language Access Planning Toolkit

Guidebook

Template

Resources



Purpose of Language Access Planning



What is **language** access for Deaf people?

→ The process of ensuring that people who are Deaf are able to access information, programs, and services at a level equal to hearing individuals.

Language Access Plan for Deaf People

- A document that maps out how an organization will provide information and services to, and engage with, people who are Deaf.
- A proactive step to reduce the chances that a person will be denied critical information and services because of language barriers
- A plan to help your organization recognize and meet the holistic experiences of Deaf people, both culturally and linguistically

Advocating for and Hiring Effective Sign Language Interpreters for Victim Services: Best Practices

Best Practices Before Meeting With a Deaf Survivor

- Ask the survivor about their preferred communication method
 - → Consider race, gender, ethnicity
- → Pre-arrange qualified interpreters in advance
 - Have a back-up plan for last minute and after-hours requests
- → Ensure interpreters are certified, traumainformed, and experienced in victim services
- → Build partnerships with local interpreter agencies

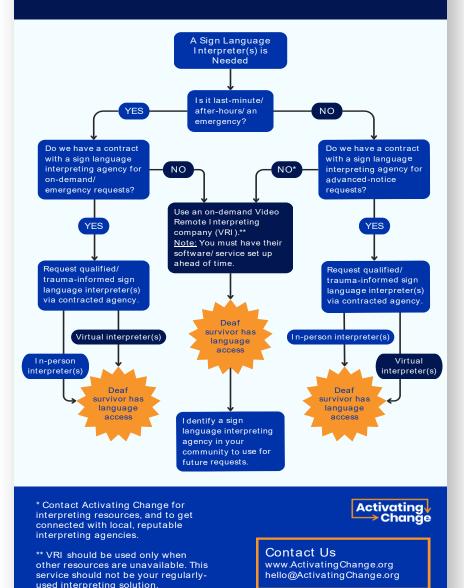
Finding Qualified Interpreters: Questions to Ask Sign Language Interpreting Agencies

- What does the agency's screening and hiring process look like when hiring sign language interpreters?
 - → What qualifications are required/preferred?
- Does the agency have a list of qualified mental health interpreting trained interpreters?
- Does the agency have interpreters experienced in trauma-informed settings?
- → Does the agency have video remote interpreting (VRI) and/or virtual interpreting services?
 - → What technology is used?

How to Meet Interpreting Needs for Deaf Survivors

- → Contract with local sign language interpreter agencies
 - → Virtual
 - → In-person
 - → On-demand/emergency
- → If unavailable: Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

How to Meet Sign Language Interpreting Needs for Deaf Survivors



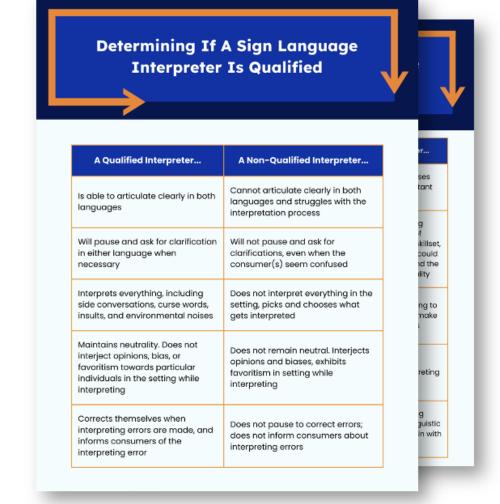
Best Practices During the Session

- Allow a few minutes for the Deaf survivor and the interpreter to acclimate before beginning
- → Positioning: the interpreter should sit where both the survivor can see the interpreter and the service provider clearly
 - \rightarrow VRI
- → Communication: speak directly to the survivor, not to the interpreter
- → Pacing
 - → Interpreters may ask you to slow down or repeat/explain something for clarification

Ensuring Effective Communication: *Best Practices*

How Do I Know if a Sign Language Interpreter is Qualified?

- Defers to the Deaf consumer regarding interpreter placement, linguistic preferences, etc.
- Will pause and ask for clarification in either language when necessary
- → Interprets everything, including side conversations, curse words, insults, and environmental noises
- → Maintains neutrality



What does Ineffective Communication Look Like?

3

Answers to questions are consistently off topic



The Deaf survivor may look confused or ask for clarification

?

The Deaf survivor may just nod as if they understand, without being able to answer questions or respond based on what was interpreted



Now What?

What Is A Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)?

- → ASL is their native language
- → Linguistic specialists
- → Cultural expertise
- → Work in teams with hearing ASL interpreters to bridge cultures
- Assist in facilitating communication using language the Deaf survivor can readily understand

When to Use a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)

- → In settings where highly complex and/or emotional information is exchanged
- → In settings where trauma is likely to impact communication
- → When working with Deaf minors
- When working with a Deaf survivor who is a non-native ASL user (i.e. from another country)
- When working with a survivor who has experienced language deprivation

What to Expect When Working With a CDI/Hearing ASL Interpreting Team

- → It may take a bit longer
- The CDI needs to be in clear visual sightlines of both the hearing interpreter and the Deaf survivor
- → The Deaf survivor should primarily be watching the CDI
- It resembles a relay process, where the Deaf and hearing interpreter work as a team to ensure effective communication

Best Practices After the Session

- Debrief with the interpreter only as necessary and ethically appropriate
- → Offer feedback opportunities for the survivor
- Avoid assumptions about capability or understanding

Ensuring Effective Communication: What Not to Do

When Advocating for Effective Interpreters in SA/DV Settings, DON'T...

- Use family members or children to interpret
- Rely on automated tools or lip reading (unless the tool is specifically requested by the survivor)
- Assume all Deaf people use ASLask first
- Schedule interpreters without survivor consent and input

Discussion

Considerations

- What challenges has your organization faced using interpreters in DV/SA settings?
- What could your organization improve upon in terms of advocating for effective interpreters in DV/SA settings?

Questions?

We're here to help!

Contact Us:
Activating Change
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