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| **Communicating effectively with Children/Young People and their Family/Carers Who Have Specific Communication Needs where abuse and or neglect is a presenting concern.**  |  |

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**Introduction**

Communicating effectively with children/young people and their family/carers who have communication difficulties can be challenging. Types of communication difficulties can vary significantly for individuals for example, language barriers, speech problems, hearing impairments, age, cognitive ability, disability and/or sensory impairments. All agencies need to ensure they are able to communicate effectively with children/young people and their parents/carers when undertaking an assessment of need or when they have concerns about abuse and/or neglect.

**Recognition of Communication Difficulties**

In working with children/young people and families, staff must establish the communication needs of the child/young person, parents and other significant family members and ensure appropriate methods are used to meet individual needs.

When receiving a verbal or written referral social workers must establish the communication needs of the child/young person, parents and other significant family members. Referrals made by health and social care staff should include information within the UNOCINI referral form relating to identified communication needs as above.

**Use of Interpreters signers or others with special communication skills**

The use of accredited interpreters, signers or others with special communication skills such as a Speech and Language Therapist, hearing impaired Therapists, and/or Occupational Therapists.must be considered when undertaking assessments involving children/young people and/or family:

* For whom English is not the first language (even if reasonably fluent in English, the option of an interpreter must be available when dealing with sensitive issues);
* With a hearing or visual impairment;
* Whose disability impairs speech;
* With learning difficulties;
* With a specific language or communication disorder;
* With severe emotional and behavioural difficulties;
* Whose primary form of communication is not speech.

Family, friends or involved professionals should not be used as interpreters within interviews/meetings, although can be used to arrange appointments and establish communication needs. **Children/young people should never be used as interpreters.**

For children/young people and/or parents requiring interpreters, it is vital to establish their dialect, pertaining to their country of origin, as it might have significant outcomes for the translation. It should also be noted that cultural issues between the interpreter and the individual may have a bearing on the translation. When planning using an interpreter consideration should always be given to gender and religious and cultural beliefsshould be respected.

**Using Interpreters with Family Members**

If the family’s first language is not English and even if they appear reasonably fluent, the offer of an interpreter should be made, as it is essential that all issues are understood and fully explained.

Interpreters used for interviewing and communicating with children/young people should have been subject to references, Access NI checks and a written agreement regarding confidentiality. Whenever possible, they should be used to interpret their own first language. The interpreter must not have any connection with the family and their cultural beliefs must be explored and considered. This is especially critical in the case of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Based Violence etc.

Staff need to first meet with the interpreter or intermediary to explain the nature of the investigation, aims and plan of the interview, and clarify:

* The interpreter/intermediary’s role in translating direct communications between professionals and family members;
* The need to avoid acting as a representative of the family;
* When the interpreter is required to translate everything that is said and when to summarise;
* That the interpreter is prepared to translate the exact words that are likely to be used – especially critical for sexual abuse;
* When the interpreter will explain any cultural issues that might be overlooked (usually at the end, unless any impede the process);
* The interpreter’s availability to interpret at other interviews and meetings and provide written translations of reports (taped versions if literacy is an issue).

Family members may choose to bring their own interpreter as a supporter.

Invitations to Child Protection Case Conferences and reports must be translated into a language/medium that is understood by the family.

Further information can be accessed:

[**HSC Business Services Organisation: Interpreting and Translations**](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1834.htm)

**Interviewing Children/Young People**

The particular needs of a child/young person who is thought to have communication difficulties should be considered at an early point in the planning of the enquiry/investigation. Consideration should be given to the use of intermediaries during interviews, assessments and/or advocacy, when appropriate.

When the child/young person is interviewed it may be helpful for an appropriate professional to assist the interviewer and child/young person. Careful planning is required of the role of this adviser and the potential use of specialised communication equipment.

All interviews should be tailored to the individual needs of the child/young person and a written explanation included in the plan about any departure from usual standards.

Staff should be aware that interviewing is possible when a child/young person communicates by means other than speech and should not assume that an interview is not possible even if it would not meet the legal standards required to be admissible as evidence.

Every effort should be made to enable such a child/young person to tell her/his story directly to those undertaking enquiries/investigation.

Workers interviewing children/young people should always be patient; identifying need across a language barrier takes time. However, the time spent up-front will be paid back by good rapport and clear communication that will avoid wasted time and dangerous misunderstandings.

Building trust with a child/young person will also take time in order for them to open up and talk about the issue you want to discuss with them, particularly if they have been told not to talk about those issues.

When using an interpreter workers must remember to speak more slowly and clearly and avoid any local slang or abbreviations to ensure information is translated correctly and allowing for the child/young person to respond, this will also promote an atmosphere of calmness.

If the child/young person becomes anxious, distressed or overtired, it will be necessary to take a break.

It may be necessary to seek further advice from professionals who know the child/young person well or are familiar with the type of impairment the child/young person has e.g. Paediatrician at the Child Development Centre, Speech and Language Therapist, the child/young person’s school or other healthcare professional e.g. Allied Health Professionals.

**Investigative Interviews in relation to Children/Young People**

The [**Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child/Young Person Abuse – Northern Ireland 2016**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/files/joint_invest_protocol.pdf) and [**Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings Guidance on Interviewing Victims and Witnesses, and Guidance on Using Special Measures (May 2011)**](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/good-practice-achieving-best-evidence-interview-child-witnesses-northern-ireland) provides guidance on interviewing children with disabilities.

Interviewers should be aware that some children/young people will be perfectly fluent in English but will use their family language for intimate parts of the body. **Useful Information**

[**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/if-your-childs-first-language-isnt-english-or-irish**](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/if-your-childs-first-language-isnt-english-or-irish)

**End.**