

GOOD PRACTICE CHECKLIST FOR INTERPRETERS WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SITUATIONS

In the spring of 2008, Standing Together against Domestic Violence carried out a piece of collaborative work on domestic violence with CITAS, the Hammersmith-based organisation that provides community engagement through interpreting, translation, outreach and advocacy in over 55 languages. It is clear that there is a need to use professionals who are well trained in interpreting, and not to make use of family and friends to interpret in domestic violence situations. In our consultation, we identified and have aimed to fill an information gap in terms of guidance for Interpreters themselves about issues they need to be aware of when interpreting for a range of agencies dealing with domestic violence survivors or perpetrators.

The work involved:

- Consulting domestic violence practitioners and Community Interpreters about what they think would be good practice when Interpreters are working for a range of agencies in situations where domestic violence has been disclosed or is suspected.
- Designing and running two training sessions for Community Interpreters on the dynamics of domestic violence and best practice. Twenty-nine interpreters from Hammersmith and Fulham, covering 24 languages, attended one

session, and eighteen of them were able to attend for a second session the following week.

- Using the results of the consultation to draw up a Domestic Violence Good Practice Guidance Checklist for Interpreters.

We are very pleased to share this Checklist with other agencies and interpreters in other boroughs, and have put it on the Standing Together website for free downloading.

Domestic violence training for Interpreters

If you would like to discuss running domestic violence training for Interpreters in your area or your agency, please contact Standing Together. Details are at the end of this Guidance. The quotes are from Interpreters who attended the training.

'I enjoyed the training sessions. The trainers were very knowledgeable, and colleagues turned the training into interactive sessions. This brought about further discussion and made this training even more informative.'

1. The Interpreter's approach:

An important point to note is that Interpreters should discuss with, and obtain, the permission of the interviewing officer before making a proactive intervention with the service user. The Public Service Interpreters' Code of Conduct defines standards.

- 'Compassionate interpreting' was recommended. What might this look like in practice? For example:
 - Being non- judgemental
 - Being professional
 - Being patient (not pressurising the survivor to take a particular course of action)
 - Demonstrating empathy with survivors of domestic violence (in demeanour/ tone/pace)
 - Listening carefully and not making assumptions – there is no typical victim/survivor or perpetrator
- Interpreting accurately, seeking clarification on any points that are unclear
- Using the right phrase and meaning and translating accurately
- Being prepared to take action if there is inappropriate behaviour by the staff member in the interview
- The interpreter can only stop the interviewing officer for a 'technical point'. However, it was suggested that if the interviewing officer was making inappropriate comments, then the interpreter can ask the officer to rephrase questions on the basis that the client would not understand the particular question
- Sharing any concern you have about the client's safety and risk factors with the professional
- The interpreter can share any cultural factors, safety concerns or evidence of domestic violence during the briefing time with the interviewing officer before the interview

- A non-judgemental approach, good training and professionalism can be more important than finding an interpreter of the same sex
- However, a same sex interpreter may make disclosure easier for survivors.

'Before coming to the domestic violence training I never thought it was as broad a subject as it is. Knowing the facts and best practice to adopt is sure to help me in my career.'

2. Before the interview

- Be sure you are knowledgeable about the issue/dynamics of domestic violence
- Think carefully about the words and their meaning in conveying key messages about domestic violence
- Understand the barriers faced by domestic violence survivors that may prevent disclosure of the abuse
- Knowledge of local and national support agencies is helpful to signpost survivors, (with the agreement of the staff member)
- The interview should be held in a private and safe place. Some interpreters reported that domestic violence interviews have been conducted in front of other members of the family, but it is felt that this is never safe practice. Babies and very young children may have to be in the same room.
- The interpreter cannot themselves ensure that the interview is conducted in a safe place. However, if there are any safety concerns, then the interpreter can ask the officer to step outside to talk about the concern OR write their concern on a piece of paper and give it to the interviewing officer.

3. During the interview

- Remind yourself of the known risk factors in relation to domestic violence
- Use training to help you to recognise inappropriate comments/victim-blaming behaviour
- Challenge or raise concerns with the interviewing officer directly
- Consider how an interpreter may challenge or raise any concerns without upsetting the interviewing officer. In most public service interpreting, concerns can only be raised after the interview.
- Make a formal complaint if necessary
- Formal complaints can be made after the interview
- Do not give advice to the survivor or perpetrator but, with the permission of the interviewing officer, you could provide up-to-date information about support agencies and those who work with perpetrators, and the national phone numbers
- Any information on domestic violence services can only be given to the client after the interview and with the permission of the officer

✓ **Behaviour towards survivors**

- Show empathy and respect, for example by demonstrating you are:
 - Genuine and warm
 - Respectful and with a positive approach according to cultural norms, but this does not mean excusing abuse
 - No physical contact with the client

✓ **Behaviour towards perpetrators**

- Avoid unwitting collusion with perpetrators and excuses for abuse
- Avoid casual conversation with the perpetrator after the interview

'The training gave me a better understanding of the difference between an unhappy relationship and an abusive relationship.'

4. After the interview

- Do not give out your personal details
- It is the duty of the interviewing office to ensure the safety of their client, but you may, with the officer's permission, check that the survivor feels safe now e.g. to go home. If it is not safe, ask the interviewing officer to address this by re-assessing the risks and safety measures.
- The interpreter needs permission from the officer to ask survivors about their safety
- After the interview, interpreters may be asked by the officer about some cultural aspects e.g. body language, if both interpreter and client are from the same culture, and can give the officer their view/understanding. However this is necessarily a matter of the interpreter's opinion, not necessarily that of the client.

5. Confidentiality and safety

What to do if a domestic violence survivor or perpetrator does not want certain information to be disclosed to the interviewing officer:

Survivor:

- Make the survivor aware of the confidentiality agreement before the start of the interview
- Respect the survivor's desire for confidentiality
- Try to persuade the client to make fuller disclosure in their own best interest
- Try to hold a dialogue/explore the client's fear, with the consent of the interviewing officer, and inform the client what the interviewer will do with the information given

Perpetrator:

- With the consent of the interviewing officer:
Make the perpetrator aware of the confidentiality agreement before the start of the interview This could be modelled on the clause in the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) contract or another similar one, see some suggested elements below.
 - Inform the client at the start of the interview that making a full disclosure is in their own best interest
 - Try to identify/explore the client's concerns about disclosure, and inform the client what the interviewer will do with the information given (this should be included in the confidentiality agreement/ contract with the perpetrator).
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Confidentiality Contract with Domestic Violence Perpetrators: suggestions for key elements to be included

- Limited confidentiality offered
- No confidentiality offered in relation to:
 - any disclosure about domestic violence incidents (past/recent & towards current/previous partners)
 - lack of motivation to change towards non-violent relationships
 - information relevant to known indicators of risk of harm to survivors. This would include drug/alcohol use, criminal history, history of experiencing abuse as a child, employment problems, breaches, etc, which perpetrators may wish to keep confidential. Interpreters would need briefing on those risk factors in training
 - information indicative of risk of harm to children and others

- Confidentiality may be offered by the interviewing officer's agency in relation to comments made by the perpetrator about the survivor or previous partners that are assessed as not being indicative of risk of harm or of lack of motivation to change his behaviour
 - No information shared with agencies that are actively supporting the survivor about her experiences of domestic violence will be shared with the perpetrator. This will need to be made explicit in the perpetrators' confidentiality agreement.
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IMPORTANT national phone numbers:

- **National Domestic Violence
24-hour Helpline 0808 2000 247**
- **Respect helpline for male
perpetrators who want to
stop their abuse 0845 122 8609**

'I will be better equipped when working in a domestic violence situation – with knowledge of local and national support agencies to give out to victims or perpetrators if needed.'

Credits and thanks

This Guidance was put together by Pinky Pradhan (Intern) and Peta Sissons (Training and Information Officer), Standing Together against Domestic Violence. Thank you to all those who commented on the drafts and made useful suggestions.

You are most welcome to use and copy this Guidance, but please credit **Standing Together against Domestic Violence 2008** if you do and give our website address for more information about our work.

www.standingtogether.org.uk

If you have any comments or feedback on this Guidance, please send them to p.sissons@standingtogether.org.uk

Contact information

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

Standing Together coordinates the operational partnership and response of a wide range of agencies to the crime of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham.

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CITAS recruits qualified Interpreters to enable the health and social care sectors in the borough to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve.

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