



Guidance for the use of interpreters in situations involving domestic abuse

Introduction

According to the 2021 Census, there are at least 88 different languages being spoken in Cambridgeshire.

People of all cultures and backgrounds can be subjected to domestic abuse; but we know from local Domestic Homicide Reviews that a victim who doesn't have English as their first language can experience difficulties with accessing support. Findings from Domestic Homicide Reviews nationally have shown that interpretation services need to be easily available, accurate, gender-sensitive and fit for purpose in order to ensure that opportunities to recognise what is taking place and provide support are not missed by those who come into contact with a victim.

The 2022 report from Victim Support - Language barriers in the criminal justice system - found victims who speak English as a second or additional language (ESL) often struggled to communicate important information to law enforcement and were not given the language support they needed during crucial encounters with the criminal justice system.

The following guidance has been compiled to support agencies and service providers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough when working with survivors of domestic abuse.

Local domestic abuse support services for speakers of other languages

The Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service (IDVAS) have specialist workers for people from Eastern European 'A8' countries and people who are from Minority Ethnic communities. The languages spoken by these specialist IDVAs include: Polish, Lithuanian and Russian.

Referral to the IDVA Service is by professionals only – please see our website for details on how to refer to the A8 and Ethnic Minority IDVAs [Cambridgeshire County Council DASV Partnership - Make a Referral \(cambsdasv.org.uk\)](https://www.cambsdasv.org.uk)

Peterborough Women's Aid have a worker who supports survivors from Lithuania [Lithuanian – Peterborough Women's Aid \(peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk\)](https://www.peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk)

The Peterborough Women's Aid Dahlia Project supports survivors from South Asian communities and workers speak a range of languages including Urdu, Punjabi, Mirpuri, Pahari and Pothwari. [The Dahlia Project – Peterborough Women's Aid \(peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk\)](https://www.peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk)

Good Practice for agencies using interpreters in situations that could involve domestic abuse

Working with an interpreter

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council use contracted suppliers for interpreting services (details on p3). This contract ensures that there is a quality framework for interpreting services including a code of practice. Other agencies will have similar arrangements.

The following are good practice points specific to work with people affected by domestic and sexual abuse:

- Always use an official independent interpreter: Never use a family member or a member of the community where the victim or perpetrator live (this includes not using local religious leaders).
- Where possible, offer the choice of having a male or female interpreter.
- Ensure that the interpreter speaks the appropriate dialect as well as language. Differences in nuances between dialects can have a significant impact on the quality of what is interpreted and understood.
- Ensure the provider has a code of conduct or code of practice that includes reference to confidentiality, personal & religious bias, equal opportunities and quality of interpretation.
- Ensure that the interpreter is fully briefed prior to an appointment and fully debrief them afterwards. During this briefing, ask the interpreter about any potential conflicts of interest.
- Be aware that the words 'domestic abuse' may not translate directly, and it may be better to ask about problems at home, whether someone is hurting them or if they/their children feel safe at home.
- Ensure that the interpreter is comfortable interpreting discussions around sexual or domestic violence. You could use the pre-brief as an opportunity to do this.
- Ask the interpreter to fully explain their role, code of conduct and duties of confidentiality etc. to the service user.
- For telephone interpreting: ensure that the person who answers the phone is the victim and that it is safe for them to talk before continuing with the conversation. Ask if the abuser is in the house.
- Remain alert to any difficulties or distress exhibited by the service user during the interpreted session.

- The interpreter's role is to give a full interpretation of everything that is said and nothing more. Do not ask the interpreter to comment on the issues and do not say anything that you do not wish the interpreter to say in the language of the client.
- Ask the interpreter to let you know if they are asked not to disclose information to you.
- Terminate the session immediately if the service user indicates that the interpreter is not suitable.
- Avoid leaving service users and interpreters alone together at any time; before, during or after the session.

Link to Interpreting and Translation Services for Cambridgeshire County Council staff [CCC People Services - The Big Word user guides - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Link to Interpreting and Translation Services for Peterborough City Council staff [Changes to translation and interpretation services \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Quality Standards for Interpreters Professional interpreting organisations should have in place systems to ensure good quality services. These should include:

- A code of conduct / practice / ethics
- Clear recruitment practices
- Appropriately qualified staff e.g. Diploma in Public Sector Interpreting or equivalent
- Processes in place for ensuring that interpreters have passed an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check
- A comprehensive training programme which includes safeguarding training and training around domestic and sexual abuse
- Processes in place for quality checks on work of interpreters
- A complaints procedure and a process for escalating issues of concern