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**Language
Brokering**

Child Language Brokering

BEST PRACTICES FOR SETTLEMENT PRACTITIONERS

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INVOLVING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON AS INTERPRETER

There can be many positive outcomes for family members when children or young people act as language brokers. However, each situation should be evaluated to determine if there is potential for affecting the young person negatively.

The following are questions you can ask to make this determination:

- ☐ Is the topic to be brokered age-appropriate for the child?
- ☐ Is the topic or situation of a sensitive nature?
- ☐ Does it have the potential to become tense or embarrassing for the parent or the child?
- ☐ Could the issue potentially involve the police?
- ☐ Is the child the topic of the discussion? (e.g. a teacher providing criticism about the child to the parent).
- ☐ Will the parent require more than translation (e.g., will they need an explanation on how a system or process works, will they have to fill documents, etc.)?

If you believe one of the above is possible, then try to arrange for one of: 1) a formal interpreter or 2) a staff member or 3) a volunteer from your organization. If this is not possible, ask the parent if they know of another adult (a friend or a family member) who could accompany and interpret for them.

A child language broker might be the only option either because an adult interpreter is not available, the parent refuses, or the above conditions do not apply to the language brokering situation.



CHILDREN OR YOUNG PERSONS AS LANGUAGE BROKERS MIGHT:

- ☐ Be apprehensive about being language brokers due to past negative experiences with the practice.
- ☐ Feel as if they bear the brunt of racist and xenophobic attitudes due to their role as language brokers.

Example: A child interprets for her mother at a store and asks a question to the sales person. The sales person asks to the girl if she and her mother are in the right store.

- ☐ Not enjoy using their first language or showing their culture of origin due to xenophobic or racist attitudes.
- ☐ Have feelings of frustration towards their parents and perceive them as incapable of acculturating.
- ☐ Not be emotionally removed from the situation like a formal interpreter would be.
- ☐ Feel awkward translating highly personal details about their parents or family members.
- ☐ Feel ill-equipped to provide translation in formal settings.
- ☐ Feel uncomfortable because they often do more than translation; they explain expectations, processes, culture, contexts, etc.

PARENTS OF CHILD LANGUAGE BROKERS MIGHT:

- ☐ Believe the children will better understand the situation and be more capable of advocating for the family rather than a formal interpreter.
- ☐ Prefer to keep the issues "within the family" and be apprehensive about sharing personal information with an unfamiliar interpreter.
- ☐ See children's participation in language brokering as part of a collaborative family effort.
- ☐ Be worried about role reversal or feel that their child is getting too much attention.
- ☐ Be experiencing feelings of anxiety or frustration about their inability to speak the language and having to depend on their child for communication.



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