

**Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services
Wednesday Webinar Series**



**Interviews for Suspected
Child Maltreatment:
Tips for Foreign Language
Interpreters**

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Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

- A project of Migration and Refugee Services, US Conference of Catholic Bishops
- National Technical Assistance Provider on Refugee Child Welfare for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
- **GOALS:**
 - *Prevent* the need for child welfare interventions through refugee family and community strengthening strategies – *strengths-based approaches*
 - *Improve access* to appropriate and effective interventions when needed by promoting collaboration between refugee and public child welfare services at local, state, and national levels


BRYCS provides national technical assistance to organizations serving refugees so that all newcomer children and youth can reach their potential.




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BRYCS Provides...

National Technical Assistance on refugees and child welfare




Web site and Clearinghouse at www.brycs.org:

- ✓ Over 4,000 resources
- ✓ BRYCS Briefs, Promising Practices, & Resource Lists
- ✓ Monthly "What's New"
- ✓ BRYCS Publications
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- ✓ Topical trainings by request
- ✓ National Technical Assistance Network



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Your trainer for this Webinar is

BRYCS Consultant and Expert on Child Abuse and Culture




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This presentation is intended for:

- Professional interpreters
- Refugee resettlement personnel and other professionals who may be asked to interpret a child abuse interview with a refugee or immigrant child or family member
- Ad hoc interpreters in emergency situations

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Today's Goals:

- Outline best practices for interpreting in these sensitive circumstances
- Let interpreters know what they should expect in an interview on possible child abuse regarding the content and process
- Help interpreters avoid common errors that might invalidate an interview regarding child abuse




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Professional interpreters are always preferred in child maltreatment interviews

Conversations are complicated and there is too much at stake to rely on ad hoc interpreters who:


- May not speak both languages well including differences in dialect
- May not know how to interpret properly
- May not be able to remain neutral and accurate when listening to highly sensitive statements

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General Information




- This webinar focuses on interviews with possible victims and witnesses, not offenders
- The suggestions given here are based on available research and years of professional experience
- Please see the list of references

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General Information

When interpreting a child maltreatment interview, it is possible that:

- No abuse or neglect will be discussed because none occurred or because the child is not ready to speak about it
- You will hear and interpret statements that are confusing and ambiguous
- You will hear and interpret reports of acts of horrible cruelty

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Different kinds of interviews related to child abuse

Child Protective Services Interviews:

- Emergency investigations
- Investigations
- Ongoing interventions where family knows social worker
- Adoption or foster care conversations
- Other: Medical or mental health



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Forensic Interviews

- Likely to be recorded or observed
- Exactness important
- Phrasing important
- Child's statements may be used in court



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Pre-Session Meeting

- It is a good idea to meet with the interviewer before the interview and ask about any special issues
- The interviewer may ask to record your name, qualifications & contact information
- You may be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge
- Use this meeting to ask questions about topics that concern you
- Ask for this meeting if it is not proposed by the interviewer



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The interviewer may not have experience working with interpreters

Let the interviewer know:

- To speak slowly and pause between utterances
- To eliminate extraneous noise
- To speak directly to the interviewee
- That only one person can speak at a time
- That an interpreted interview will take more time
- That sometimes it may take you a while to interpret a simple question or answer because some of the concepts do not translate exactly



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Let the interviewer know that you may pause the interview



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- If you know the child or family
- If you and the child cannot understand each other's language or dialect
- If something else interferes with anyone's understanding
- If there are problems with particular words or concepts
- If you need to make a cultural aside



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What to expect from the child being interviewed



David Snyder for Catholic Relief Services

- A variety of emotional responses
- A variety of behaviors
- Often, we do not see what we would expect



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What to expect from the child being interviewed

Children may:

- Indicate that no abuse occurred
- Give confusing reports
- Say things that seem unbelievable
- Indicate clearly and precisely what happened
- Contradict themselves
- Speak in baby talk
- Sound old for their age
- Mix two or more languages
- Make sexual sounds
- Use "dirty" terms



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What to expect from the child's statement:

Children may report:

- Shocking mistreatment or neglect
- Being deprived of food or care
- Being forced to witness or do horrible things
- Feelings of terror, love and confusion
- Being restrained



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What to expect from the child being interviewed



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- Children may indicate that they have participated in activities that you find shocking
- Children may indicate that they felt fear, pleasure, pain, love, confusion, nervousness, etc. in response to the sexual activity
- Children may indicate that some things happened that you wish were not true



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What to expect from yourself in a child abuse interview

You may feel:

- Angry at the alleged offender, the child, the interviewer, the police, or someone else
- Pity for the child
- Disgust about what may have happened
- Impatient to get to the end of the interview



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What to expect from yourself in a child abuse interview

A variety of responses:

- The child's statement may implicate someone you know, like and admire
- You may find yourself disbelieving the interviewee
- You may want to warn certain people
- The child's report may remind you of experiences in your own life

Regardless of your own feelings, remember to respond neutrally, interpret accurately, and observe confidentiality. If you have strong feelings at the end of the session ask the interviewer to chat with you.



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Tips for handling strong feelings in a child abuse interview

- Take a deep breath
- Change your physical position
- Take a sip of water
- Decide that you'll process what you're feeling after the interview

Remember that your professionalism and accuracy help assure justice and safety both for the child and for the accused



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What to expect from the interviewer



- Repeats questions
- Moves slowly
- Asks for details
- Uses the child's words
- Seems to want the child to state something explicitly
- Asks questions with sexual details or words
- May use other media
- Other



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What to expect from the interviewer

- Usually, interviewers will respond without show of emotion even to awful stories of abuse
- Research has shown it is easier for children to speak to warm and friendly interviewers who respond neutrally



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Interpreter's Role in Child Maltreatment Interviews

- Serve as a conduit for others' speech
- Display a professional demeanor
- Maintain neutrality
- Interpret all questions that are posed to you
- Avoid extra conversations after introductions
- Be unobtrusive



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While interpreting child maltreatment interviews...



- Avoid summarizing and rephrasing
- Interpret verbatim and avoid serving as assistant interviewer
- The clearer the roles, the better
- Adjustments may be required if the child is very young or intellectually impaired

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Especially important in child maltreatment interviews

- Completeness, exactness AND understanding
- Repeat precisely, sticking as close to the form of speech as possible
- Use the child's idiosyncratic words for body parts, family members, etc.
- Rapport should be between interviewer and child—you are on the sidelines


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Please keep in mind

- Embarrassment impedes accuracy
- Although you may want the family or community to save face—you must interpret accurately
- You cannot share what you have learned with anyone outside the interview
- It is okay if you do not know certain terms but be sure to inform the interviewer of this
- The interview is one part of an extensive investigation process


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Seating Arrangements




Interviewer sits here Interviewee (child) sits here Interpreter sits here

People usually choose to have the interpreter sit to the side of and slightly behind the interviewee. This might be confusing to a young child. Figure out what works best for you.


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Seating Arrangements



Interviewer sits here Interviewee (child) sits here Interpreter sits here

Notice how this arrangement enhances rapport and eye contact between the interviewer and the child

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Who is the interpreter working for in this interview?



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- Interpreter is working to assure the most accurate communication of the statements given by both parties
- Not working towards any particular outcome other than the most accurate communication of statements


Beyond language



- Your most important job is to convey the words used
- Your voice should also convey the kind of speech used
- Try to convey the emotional quality of the speech
- Keep your body language and facial expressions neutral

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Post-session debriefing



After the session, try to speak alone with the interviewer about:

- Doubts you might have about the quality of the interpretation
- Cultural issues that you think the interviewer should know about
- Other concerns you may have

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Example #1: Habibo

- Habibo is a refugee resettlement worker and is a Somali refugee herself
- She knows virtually everyone in her small community and is related to many
- Her English and Somali language skills are strong
- She has never trained as a professional interpreter but interprets often for members of her community


She has been asked to interpret a forensic interview with a child regarding suspected sexual abuse. Should she agree to interpret this interview?

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What should Habibo do?

Habibo should probably **not** interpret the interview because:

- She may be asked to testify in court about the interview
- She may be blamed if the family does not like the outcome
- The child may be too ashamed to discuss these issues in front of a known person
- She may find it extremely difficult to follow the rules of confidentiality
- It may be too tempting to serve as an advocate




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Habibo might decide to interpret the interview anyway

If so, she should:


- Explain to the interviewer her relationship to the child and family
- Explain her role to the child and explain that she will not tell anyone what is recounted in the interview
- Give the child the option of requesting another interpreter
- Expect that her role will become known in the community
- Habibo should understand that she may be asked to testify in court



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Habibo during the interview



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- Habibo needs to be clear that her role in this interview is to convey language as accurately as possible.
- Habibo may hear the child say some disturbing things about people Habibo knows and whom she may respect
- Habibo may believe or not believe the people who are interviewed—her opinion is not relevant during the interview
- Habibo may feel upset during the interview

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Refugee Caseworkers


It can be awkward for resettlement caseworkers who are former refugees to interpret child abuse interviews in their communities

- Some decide to do it anyway
- Some decide not to
- If they do agree to interpret these interviews, they need to be highly professional before, during and after




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Example #2: Enrique



- Enrique is a professional interpreter who grew up in Mexico
- He was called by CPS to interpret an investigation into child abuse in the home of a Central American family




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Example #2: Enrique (cont.)

- Enrique meets the CPS investigator (Valerie) outside an apartment building in a rundown neighborhood
- A child in the family, Angela, had bruises on her legs at school and a counselor called in a report of suspected child abuse
- Valerie and Enrique enter the building. The hallways smell of urine and are scattered with trash

Enrique feels himself growing angry and disgusted.



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Example #2: Enrique (cont.)

- They meet with the Garcia family together and separately
- Cockroaches, dirty dishes, no food in refrigerator
- Thin children, baby covered in diaper sores
- Ms. Garcia weeps, says her children are out of control, her husband walked out one day and never returned
- She denies knowing about the bruises but then admits that she asked her brother to come and discipline her children

Enrique tries to stay focused on transmitting words accurately, but inside he is growing increasingly angry and disgusted with the conditions in which the Garcia family is living.



Example #2: Enrique (cont.)

- Enrique is feeling so flooded with emotions, he's having trouble doing his work.
- He takes deep breaths and focuses on the task at hand.
- Over the course of the interview Angela describes physical and sexual abuse that makes Enrique feel disgusted and angry. He stays calm and even handed.

Enrique reminds himself that this interview is extremely difficult for both Ms. Garcia and especially for Angela, who is terrified of these two strangers who are asking her personal questions. Enrique maintains a warm, gentle and understanding demeanor as he interprets. In this way, he helps the family stay calm.



Thank you for your commitment to this issue!



Photo/Claudia Gilmore

So that every child and family can be heard, understood & respected,
And receive the best possible professional response to child maltreatment.

We'll have some time for questions now.



Contact Us!



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www.brycs.org

Email:
info@brycs.org

Phone:
1-888-572-6500

Don't forget to download the [Highlighted Resources List](#) that accompanies this Webinar & BRYCS Brief [Suggestions for Interviewing Refugee and Immigrant Children](#)

The author thanks Luis Martin Valdiviezo & Alexandra Levi for their helpful comments on this presentation.

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