Booking the appointment
• This is the time to ask whether an interpreter is needed.
• Allot extra time. These interviews can easily take twice as long as more typical patient visits.
• If you and the family have found a trusted interpreter, try to use the same person for all of their visits.

Before the office visit: Speak with the interpreter
• Speak with the interpreter to discuss goals and how best to achieve them. Emphasize that families must make decisions for themselves about medical matters.
• Encourage the interpreter to intervene if a misunderstanding occurs or seems likely.
• Be respectful of the interpreter’s time: they may have several other appointments. Try not to be late or delayed for the appointment and be watchful of the time during the clinic visit.

During the visit: Advice for practitioners
• Sit in a circle so that everyone can see non-verbal cues.
• Introduce the interpreter and the family. Ask the interpreter to describe their own role.
• Ask the family if they feel comfortable working with this interpreter.
• Explain your role as clinician and the purpose of the visit.
• Look at family members when speaking to them and while the interpreter speaks. Speak directly, using “I” and “you” whenever possible. Remember, a family may look to the interpreter instead of you when answering questions.
• Speak slowly and clearly. Use short sentences, pause frequently to allow the interpreter to translate, and give only small amounts of information at a time.
• Avoid idioms, jargon, slang, abbreviations, acronyms or jokes, which may cause confusion.
• Repeat important instructions and explanations. If you think there has been a miscommunication, restate in a different way. Ask the patient, parent or caregiver to repeat the information back to you.
• Maintain responsibility for the visit. The interpreter’s role is to convey information and discussion accurately, not to come up with medical or other explanations.
• Do not carry on a separate discussion with the interpreter without first explaining why to the family. Also, ask the interpreter to explain to them the nature and content of that conversation.
• If you are speaking in English or French with an adolescent patient, be sure to ask a less-fluent parent how much should be interpreted for their benefit.
• Allow enough time for the family to ask questions.

After the visit: Debrief with the interpreter
• Ask whether the interpreter observed anything you should know about.
• As required, ask the interpreter to write down instructions for the family.
• Ask if the interpreter can help with scheduling follow-up appointments, if needed.
• Be sure to book an interpreter for any follow-up appointments. If possible use the same person.
• If possible, ask the interpreter to accompany the family for lab tests or to the pharmacy.

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