



# Caring for Kids New to Canada

A guide for health professionals working with  
immigrant and refugee children and youth

## Checklist

# Using an interpreter with children, youth and families

### 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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