



Interpreting for the Vulnerable

The Interpreter Role

- Two main functions:
- Facilitating communication
- Acting as a cultural mediator

Additional Goals

- Building rapport and trust between the survivor and the provider
- Avoiding re-traumatization



Interpreting for the Vulnerable

The Interpreter Role

Interpreter must be *NEUTRAL*

- Interpreter must remain impartial, should not offer personal opinions, provide advice of any kind to the survivor, or get involved in side conversations with the survivor
- Interpreter cannot be another survivor, family, or someone who has a relationship with the survivor
- Interpreter must not have ties to the trafficker/abuser, either in the United States or in the home country, nor to the survivor, or to anyone else involved in the case

The Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. (n.d.). Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide. Retrieved from <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/>

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The Interpreter Role

Interpreter must interpret **ACCURATELY**

- Interpreters should have a complete grasp of the two languages they are interpreting, as well as training in the skill of interpreting
- Interpreter interprets exactly what the interviewer states and what the survivor states. No summaries or euphemisms. No elaborating beyond what either the interviewer or the survivor states

Every word matters

Case in point: If in his native language “traffico” (Italian) means “smuggling” or “racketeering”, the survivor is likely to honestly deny having been subjected to trafficking.

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Kat Anderson. (October 10, 2013). Nuances matter when interpreting for trafficking cases. Pacific Media Workers Guild. The Newspaper Guild. CWA Local 39521. <http://mediaworkers.org/when-interpreting-for-trafficking-cases-nuances-matter/>

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The Interpreter Role

Interpreter may act as a *CULTURAL BROKER*

- Interpreter can also be a valuable cultural resource to the interviewer
- Interpreter may explain any particularly relevant cultural dynamics that may impact communication with the survivor

By understanding cultural nuances, interpreter may be able to determine that the survivor may be subtly conveying psychological coercion to which she has been subjected, or threats to her or her family members

Case in point: One woman engaged as a domestic worker by a Saudi Arabian family discovered her bags had been searched, implying a deadlier threat than might appear on the surface: If the employer claimed to find stolen goods, the woman could be subjected to punishments dictated by Sharia law.

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Interpreting for the Vulnerable

The Interpreter Role

Interpreter must maintain strict **CONFIDENTIALITY**

- Interpreters must acknowledge that all information they learn as a result of their involvement with the investigation or case is highly confidential

Survivors may not trust in person interpreters to maintain confidentiality, and may prefer a telephonic interpreter who is not able to see the survivor or who may be from a distant location

Case in point: Confidentiality is vital for survivors of human trafficking. Their lives and the lives of their families are often at great risk if they try to escape their servitude or initiate criminal investigations against their captors.

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RESOURCES: THE MINDSET OF A HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIM. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/understanding_the_mindset_of_a_trafficking_victim.pdf

Interpreting for the Vulnerable

The Interpreter Role

Interpreter must ***UNDERSTAND THE MENTALITY*** of a survivor and be prepared to be patient

- Interpreters should be prepared for the potential of asking difficult questions. Questions that get to the heart of exploitation are often very difficult, invasive, and probing
- Interpreters should be prepared for the topics that may be covered and ensure they can handle it

A survivor may prefer an interpreter of the same or different gender, or from the same or a different cultural or religious community

This may be a lengthy process

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Glossary

Blade/track: Places/streets that are popular for victims to be trafficked

Bottom: A female appointed by the trafficker/pimp to supervise the others and report rule violations

Caught A Case: when a pimp or victim has been arrested and charged with a crime

Choosing Up: The process by which a different pimp takes “ownership” of a victim

Circuit: A series of cities among which prostituted people are moved

Cousin-in-Laws: Victims of pimp partners who work together.

Exit Fee: The money a pimp will demand from a victim who is thinking about trying to leave. It will be an exorbitant sum, to discourage her from leaving

Family/Folks: The term used to describe the other individuals under the control of the same pimp

Head Cut: A victim getting beaten down by their pimp.

I went on a date last night: met with a buyer of sex

In the life: Women and girls will say they’ve been “in the life” if they’ve been involved in prostitution for a while.

Lot Lizard: Derogatory term for a person who is being prostituted at truck stops.

Renegade: A person involved in prostitution without a pimp.

Out of pocket: giving money to another pimp, or giving services away for free

The Wire: A pimp hotline, like a phone tree pimps use to get the word around, to find out which city is on/off.

Stelter, Leischen. “Know the Language of Human Trafficking: A Glossary of Sex Trafficking Terms.” In Public Safety. June 17, 2020. Accessed June 19, 2020. <https://inpublicsafety.com/>.



Don't be Surprised if a Victim...

- Denies they are a victim
- Is fearful of what will happen to them
- Is fearful of you and what you will do to her/him
- Is distracted, angry, reluctant, or concerned about her/his own needs
- Has fears around safety and privacy, particularly if the interview is in front of others
- Has unmet medical needs, including nutrition or lack of sleep
- Has multiple versions of the same story
- Is disoriented
- Is angry (transference of anger)
- If the victim/survivor tries to manipulate you (they'll say "you are my favorite" this will be manipulation as part of the primary stages of survival mode)

"Human Trafficking Task Force E-Guide." Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center. Accessed June 18, 2020. <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/5-building-strong-cases/53-victim-interview-preparation/trauma-informed-victim-interviewing/>.

Interpreter's Do's & Don'ts for Trauma-informed Approach

- Do find out the protocols for the facility/agency
- Do prepare to discuss very difficult topics
- Don't interpret if you don't feel comfortable in the situation—it's ok/better to have a different interpreter come in
- Don't feel offended if the survivor asks for a different interpreter (if the interpreter is in any way similar to the abuser/trafficker this might be a reason why the survivor asks to switch an interpreter)
- Do dress very neatly and be organized in the way you look (structure = safety for the survivor)
- Don't use fragrance – smell triggers memories/re-traumatization
- Don't change the message even if you think the survivor is not understanding it. Address it with the provider and stay within the interpreter role
- Do study the terminology



Interpreter's Do's & Don'ts for Trauma-informed Approach

- Don't judge, see the **need** behind the behavior
- Don't make sudden movements
- Don't expect eye – contact (trauma trust factor)
- Don't touch - it can cause re-traumatization
- Be mindful of when you ask for a break (when a memory pattern is trying to come back, let the interviewer decide when the break is)
- Be cautious of showing emotional responses (if the interpreter shows emotion, it can do two things: **a.** the survivor may realize something is really bad and translate that into “what’s wrong with me?” ex. “why am I not crying?”; or **b.** they may suppress what they are saying not to upset you.)
- Don't show sympathy, show empathy instead – allow for the moment to be about the survivor



Interpreter's Do's & Don'ts for Trauma-informed Approach

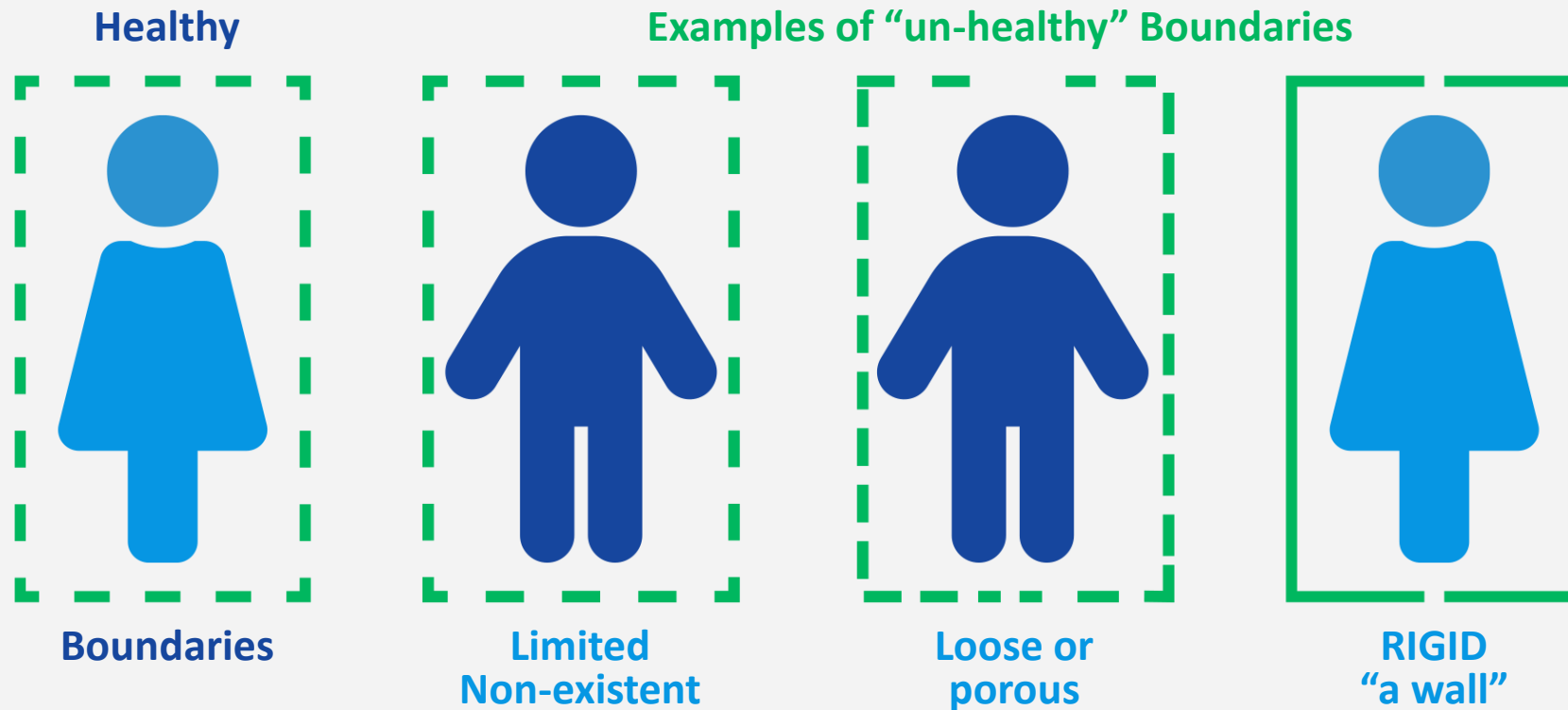
- Be mindful not “mind full”: self-aware, other-aware, situationally aware
- Do pay attention, stay on purpose, stay in the Present
- Don't minimize the situation trying to reassure them negating their lived experience
- Don't disconnect from your humanity – people feel that
- Do stay at same eye level (sit down if the survivor is sitting, stand up if they are standing)
- **Do stay regulated**, be comfortable with the discomfort that you are feeling
- Do model the desired behavior: use the tonality and register of the clinician
- Do remember that non-verbal channels of communication are critical (since nonverbal channels are processed directly by the primitive “downstairs brain”)

Interpreter's Do's & Don'ts for Trauma-informed Approach

- Don't make promises
- Don't offer services beyond the scope of the assignment
- Don't let the survivor borrow your phone (can jeopardize their safety)
- Do remember: the interpreter too may become emotionally flooded - with greater intensity, more regulation is needed
- Make sure that you have healthy boundaries with the individuals (don't fall for manipulation)

Dion, Lisa. *Aggression in Play Therapy: a Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity*.
New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Maintain healthy boundaries



<https://sharingmysong.com/2019/02/20/healthy-and-unhealthy-boundaries/>

Don't Say

Do Say

Child / teen prostitute	Trafficking survivor
Victim	Survivor
That's so awful, I can't/don't believe it!	I believe you and it's not your fault.
You are safe now.	We will do everything we can to keep you safe.
You can trust me.	Trust my actions, not my words.

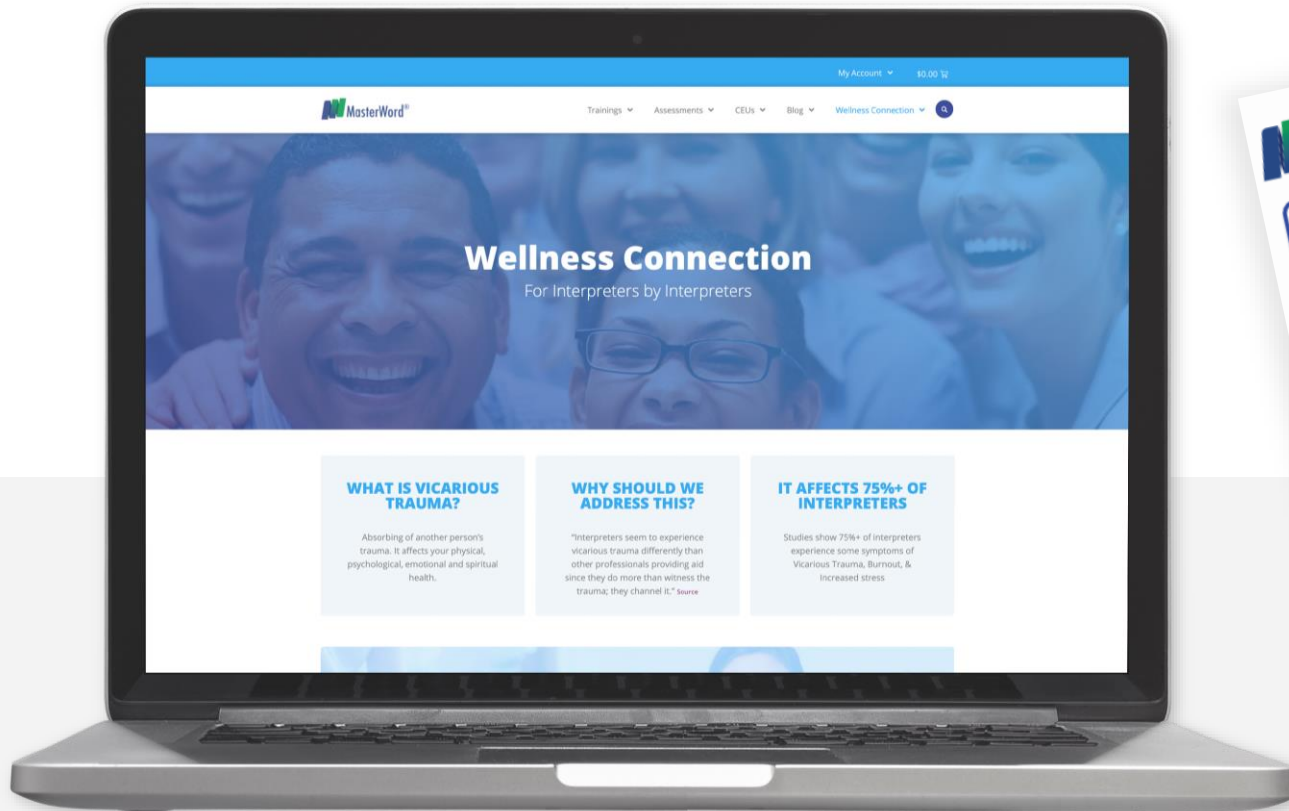


Interpreter's Do's & Don'ts for Trauma-Informed Approach

- Do understand what primary, secondary and vicarious trauma can do to a person
- Make sure you have a healthy self care protocol:
 1. Trauma affects 100% of people exposed to it, but only 60-70% recover.
 2. Studies show 75%+ of interpreters experience some symptoms of vicarious trauma, burnout, & increased stress for days after the assignment.
- Do remember the steps “Before, During, and After” the encounter

Wellness Connection

Tools / Resources / Blogs / Events



<https://institute.masterword.com/wellness-connection>