

## Preparing for Psychoeducational and Speech Evaluations:

### What Medical Interpreters Need to Know

This session was presented by Ana Soler, currently a PhD candidate, representing the National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (NAETISL). Ana shared a wealth of knowledge about interpreting in educational settings and how to prepare for the specialized terminology used during psychoeducational and speech evaluations. NAETISL is a nonprofit organization that started 3 years ago, with the mission of motivating educational interpreters and translators to continue their education, professional development, and knowledge expansion. So far, NAETISL has established the Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, qualifications, and hopefully soon, the national certification test for interpreters in education.

Translators and interpreters adhere to federal laws. Thanks to parents' advocacy, in 2004, the following rule was included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: *"Use of interpreters or other action, as appropriate. The public agency must take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of the IEP Team meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents with deafness or whose native language is other than English"* [CFR 300.322(e)]

When a child speaks a language other than English at home, the child needs to be evaluated in all the languages they speak. All the languages must be represented in the assessment process to rule out that any type of disability or impairment has no relation to the fact that the child is learning or processing different languages.

*Special education* is individualized instruction, and with an accurate evaluation of the strengths and needs of the child, a specific plan (IEP, *Individualized Educational Program*) can be built to meet those needs so that the child can be successful. The IEP is a legally binding contract in which the school district agrees to provide specific services to the student.

English learners or emergent bilinguals that are also placed in special education programs have the highest representation in two categories of special education: specific learning disabilities (48%) and speech or language impairment (18%). The interpreters are more likely to support families who have children with a specific learning disability or a speech and language impairment in our schools since these two categories are more prevalent in our communities.

During her research, Ana observed that one of the reasons for this incidence was the failure in communication and the lack of qualified interpreters to explain the process and help families through the assessment. Therefore, it is important that interpreters are always well prepared in these areas and should continuously expand their knowledge into other areas of special education.

Interpreters assist in a variety of meetings with parents, educators, school psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, lawyers, and community advocates, to name a few. Sometimes, these meetings can extend for several hours, and interpreters should advocate for themselves and practice self-care. Pre-session meetings with the providers are always helpful to explain our roles as interpreters, clarify expectations, and discuss limitations.

Interpretation modes that work better in educational settings are consecutive and sight translations. Simultaneous interpretation is the most efficient, but parents and educators are not used to working with this mode, and it doesn't allow for parents to ask questions during meetings.

Another area that interpreters need to be prepared is the *eligibility categories for special education*, which are established by federal legislation. A description of each category and the explanation of the eligibility process can be found in the Department of Education site of your state.

We must familiarize ourselves with the *type of assessment* instruments used during the evaluation process such as: neuropsychological, psychoeducational, speech and language, educational, occupational therapy, personality, or projective techniques. The type of assessments used will vary according to the type of disabilities that are being explored.

*Learning disabilities* is a term used to describe a range of learning disabilities which can affect speech, reading, writing, sometimes behavior, or combined with hyperactivity, etc.

A term that will usually appear in an individualized educational plan is *least restrictive environment*, and Ana explains it as, "the time that a child spends away from the rest of their peers in general education." There is a range of types of environment or classrooms, from very restrictive, such as a hospital or residential facility for a child with an emotional or behavioral disability, to the least restrictive environment like general education classrooms.

*Accommodations* are the supports that are given to children, who may have some difficulties, to address their needs; it could be as simple as a calculator, headphones, or extended time to complete an assignment, for example.

Children with multiple disabilities or rare disorders might require *assistive technology* in the form of machines or devices that help them to be included in the school setting and participate in all of the activities, just like everybody else.

*Extended school year (ESY)* is a service that is provided to special education students who specifically experience regression or loss of skills during the summer break and require a continuity of the free and appropriate education.

Always remember to prepare well in the above-mentioned areas, find out ahead of time as much information as you can about the assignment, update your glossaries, and help educators understand how to work with interpreters.