

Working with an interpreter

A sign language interpreter is a trained professional who facilitates communication between deaf and hearing individuals. The role of the interpreter is to interpret spoken communication into sign for the child who is deaf and interpret sign into spoken communication for the person who is hearing. The interpreter conveys all information directly and without changing, abbreviating, or commenting on the information.

Some children with cochlear implants may benefit from use of an interpreter. These children may include:

1. Children from families with deaf parents who use American Sign Language
2. Children from hearing families who have used American Sign Language with their child
3. Children who were recently implanted and transitioning to understanding spoken English
4. Children who have receptive and/or expressive language learning challenges

Strategies for working with an interpreter

- Address the class as usual and avoid speaking directly to the interpreter. In one-on-one conversations with the child with a cochlear implant, address the child directly rather than the interpreter.
- Do not ask the interpreter to “tell him/her I said X.” Speak normally and the interpreter will transmit what you say in sign language.
- Work with the interpreter and the child to find an optimal seating arrangement that allows the child to see the interpreter but minimizes distraction to the rest of the group.
- Provide vocabulary words and basic information about your lesson plan to the interpreter ahead of time. This will increase the likelihood that the interpreter conveys the content you are presenting accurately.

Additional information

- Do not be surprised if more than one interpreter is working with the child. Because interpreting is tiring work, interpreters often work in tandem, trading off every 30 or 60 minutes.
- An interpreter can only convey one speaker’s message at a time, so enforce a “single voice” rule when speaking to the child.
- Be patient. Allow time for the child to ask questions and for the interpreter to convey what the child has said.