Why use a professionally trained interpreter?
Interpreting is not a simple matter of being bilingual—language is only one part of the job.

A professionally trained interpreter will
• transfer a message accurately, clearly and in full—nothing added, nothing omitted
• understand (and be able to translate) technical words and expressions
• be impartial—not take sides, offer opinion or comment
• not have a personal connection to the non-English speaker
• be bound by a code of ethics, which includes confidentiality.

Why not use a family member, friend or colleague?
A friend, family member or colleague
• may not pass on all points and details of the message, possibly causing significant distortion of the contents
• won’t be aware of role boundaries and could tend to give personal advice and opinions
• could pass on private information to others since they are not bound by a code of ethics or confidentiality agreement.

The non-English speaker is less likely to speak openly if a family member is interpreting.

How do I know if I need an Interpreter?
First ask yourself how well you understand what the non-English speaker is saying. Can you do your job effectively without an interpreter?

Then, if you’re not sure about the other person’s English:
• ask a few open-ended questions, something that needs an answer that is more than just “yes” or “no”, e.g. “What brings you here today?”
• ask the person to repeat instructions back to you, e.g. “Tell me, how will you use this equipment/take this medicine?”
• look for indicative body language, e.g. extra nervousness, a blank facial expression or constant smiling.

You need an interpreter if you have concerns from the questions above, or if
• the customer shows you a card like this:

How do I work with an interpreter?

The basics:
• Speak directly to the customer as if the interpreter is not there—ignore the interpreter completely
• Speak clearly and unhurriedly
• Take turns to speak
• Pause every couple of sentences
• Wait until the interpreter has finished before continuing.

Additionally:
For face-to-face interpreting:
• Sit opposite the non-English speaker
• Position the interpreter at an equal distance from you both

For telephone interpreting:
• Use a speaker phone whenever possible
• Wait while the interpreter is connected to the call.

Should I use face-to-face or phone?
Use face to face (onsite) interpreting
• for the first consultation with a non-English speaker
• for tricky appointments where there are difficult concepts to explain or bad news to impart
• in counselling or mental health situations
• when the client has physical or mental impairment
• in meetings where written documents have to be interpreted, e.g. reports, forms, instructions.

Use telephone interpreting
• for an urgent connection, e.g. medical emergency
• when onsite is not available due to remote locations or interpreters not being in the region
• when the interpreting engagement is likely to be simple and short (less than 30 minutes), e.g. to set up or cancel an appointment
• when there is no local interpreter.
Limits to the interpreter’s role

• The interpreter is present only to remove the language barrier, not to carry out other tasks or act as a support person for the client.

• The interpreter is impartial – avoid asking for his/her opinion or comment.

• Maintain control of the interview by checking the client’s understanding yourself – ask exploratory questions that can be interpreted.

• Everything said will be interpreted – don’t ask the interpreter to summarize or report on the main points after the fact.

• Avoid engaging in personal conversation with the interpreter.

To request an interpreter

Phone: (04) 384 2849 or 0508 468 377
Email: request@interpret.org.nz
Web: www.interpret.org.nz

You will be asked for the following

• Your name, agency and location

• The language required

• The date and time the interpreter is required

• The approximate length of the appointment

• The topic to be discussed (this helps the interpreter to be well prepared)

• The name of the client (so that the interpreter can refuse the assignment if the client is known)

• Any particular needs, such as a particular gender of interpreter.