

Code of Ethics for Sign Language Interpreters
Dutch Association for Sign Language Interpreters (NBTG)



This code of ethics is a description of the values and standards system of sign language interpreters. It contains the principles and rules of practise of the profession. In addition to this code of ethics there are also the NBTG code of professional interpreters in the mental health care, and the professional code of deaf blind interpreters.

Introduction

The interpreter delivers her¹ sign language interpreting services in settings in which the deaf/hard-of-hearing and hearing people want to communicate with each other. We refer to these individuals hereinafter as participants/clients.

The form of Dutch sign language interpreting depends on the participants needs.

1. from spoken Dutch to Dutch sign language or sign systems and vice versa.
2. from written Dutch to Dutch sign language or sign system and vice versa.

The interpreter and the participants are jointly responsible for a proper conduct of the assignment. To achieve a good quality of interpreting, it is important that, in addition to the professional responsibility of the interpreter, the participants are responsible for creating good working conditions on the basis of cooperation.

The work of the Dutch sign language interpreter² has been worked out in the Dutch professional profile of the Dutch professional sign language Interpreters Association (NBTG).

1 Accepting an assignment

The interpreter is aware of her interpreter skills and level and only accepts an assignment in accordance her capabilities.

An interpreter should, before she accepts an assignment, check whether she, within this assignment, can hold to the professional code and whether she can handle the assignment. Hereby she shall ask herself the following questions regarding the assignment:

1. Am I knowledgeable enough for this assignment?
2. Do I have enough skills?
3. Am I able to complete this assignment properly with my social and ethical views?

If one of these three questions is answered negatively the interpreter should not accept the assignment or give it back when the assignment has already been accepted.

2 Relations with participants

The sign language interpreter:

1. informs the client about the professional code and the terms of delivery. If she considers that there is insufficient knowledge, the interpreter will provide the necessary information in advance or on the spot.
2. respects the independence and the responsibility of each participant and shows that in her attitude and behaviour towards the participants. When the interpreter works for underage persons, the direct responsibility for the participants is that of the parent(s) or carer(s).
3. shows in her attitude no difference between deaf and hearing participants.
4. functions as defined in the NBTG professional profile.

3 The assignment

The sign language interpreter:

1. translates the message completely and truthfully, both in terms of content and in terms of intention of the participants. The interpreter takes into account social and cultural differences. During the

¹ 'she' can be read as 'he' and 'her' can also be read as 'his'

² Dutch sign language interpreter will from now on be referred to as interpreter or sign language interpreter

assignment the interpreter fulfils no other functions, as for example the role of adviser or counsellor.

2. is responsible for the communication and not responsible for the consequences arising from the assignment. If the interpreter considers her linguistic or interpreter techniques insufficient, she must immediately tell the participants and discuss with them possible solutions. If during the assignment it turns out that the interpreter and participants have different social and/or ethical views, then the interpreter will not let this affect the assignment. In both cases the interpreter will if necessary withdraw from the assignment.
3. will adapt her attitude, behaviour and appearance in an appropriate manner within the setting/situation in which is being interpreted.
4. exerts influence even by her presence on the course of the communication in the assignment, but does not interfere with the content of the setting. The interpreter is, however, held to the Dutch law which includes the civil code³ (see also 4.3).

4 Code of silence

1. Already from the first contact the interpreter considers the information about the interpreter assignment as confidential. From the moment of accepting the assignment the interpreter holds a relationship trust with the participants. The interpreter is therefore bound by the code of silence and keeps strict secrecy about what she hears or sees during an interpreter assignment.
2. the interpreter uses the knowledge and information, which she receives through interpreting, not to her own benefit and does not cooperate with others if they use or misuse that knowledge to benefit themselves.
3. When during professional practise the interpreter receives information showing that the mental or physical well-being of third parties may be endangered or that even their life is in danger, they may report this to the appropriate institutions.

5 Collegiate contacts

The sign language interpreter:

1. If necessary, supports her fellow interpreters with her own expertise and experience. Gives colleagues feedback, for example during intervision.
2. takes into account overall code of silence during collegiate contacts.
3. says nothing about fellow interpreters and participants during an interpreter setting.
4. can, when a colleague is not behaving in accordance with this code of ethics, bring it to her attention. In case of disagreement she can turn to the notified institution.

Glossary

1. Deaf and hard of hearing people: all people who have a hearing impairment, such as prelingual deaf, suddenly deaf, late deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing.
2. Client: individual or organization that requests the interpreter.
3. participants: the attendees in an interpreter setting.
4. sign language: a visually manual language, a natural language with its own vocabulary and grammar.
5. Sign system: a devised system derived from the Dutch or Dutch sign language (such as Dutch with signs).
6. Interpreter assignment: situation for which a sign language interpreter (or interpreters) is/are deployed.
7. Interpreter setting: the situation in which the interpreter is at work.

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³ see article 7: 453 Dutch civil code.