



CODAs and Interpreting Responsibilities

Appropriate boundaries, child welfare and the responsibility of services to provide professional language access.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

All professionals

A practical professional resource to support respectful, individualised practice with Children of Deaf Adults and their families. CODA identity is not itself a diagnosis, deficit, safeguarding indicator or support need.

SCOPE AND STATUS

This is general professional guidance, not legal advice, a statutory procedure or a substitute for local safeguarding policies. Duties differ across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland. Verify local requirements before applying this resource.

Everyday family communication and professional interpreting are different

Some children naturally move between languages in family life. Ordinary exchanges such as sharing a simple household message differ greatly from interpreting a clinical consent discussion, statutory meeting, safeguarding interview, financial transaction or legal appointment.

Competence in two languages does not automatically confer specialist interpreting skills, neutrality, confidentiality or emotional protection; the organisation arranging the meeting must take responsibility for access.

- Never routinely use children to interpret important adult matters.
- Treat interpreting arrangements as part of service planning, not as an optional favour.
- Ask adults what language and format they use, rather than assuming a family member can help.

High-risk situations requiring particular care

Professional support is particularly important for medical diagnosis and consent, safeguarding, child protection, domestic abuse, mental health, legal proceedings, significant financial decisions and educational reviews. These contexts can involve complex language, sensitive information and conflicts of interest.

For some urgent situations a perfect arrangement may not be immediately available; use an approved emergency response, minimise reliance on untrained people, assess immediate safety and document why the chosen communication route was necessary.

- Consider specialist interpreter expertise and professional registration.
- Protect the privacy of the parent and child.
- Check technical quality and confidentiality of remote interpreting.

Professional responsibilities

The applicable legal framework varies by territory and service. In Great Britain, reasonable adjustments may require communication support under the Equality Act 2010. NHS England's Accessible Information Standard sets out additional sector expectations. In Ireland, duties for defined public bodies arise under the Irish Sign Language Act 2017.

Staff should know booking routes, payment responsibility, escalation processes and how to postpone non-urgent business safely when access breaks down.

- Communicate directly with the Deaf person throughout.
- Brief interpreters appropriately without disclosing irrelevant personal information.
- Confirm the person's preferred communication format for follow-up.

Recognising inappropriate reliance on a child

Warning signs include repeated absence from lessons to interpret, a child appearing responsible for navigating adult disputes, a parent receiving no direct accessible correspondence, or a child being asked to convey confidential news. These are prompts to investigate the service response and the child's wellbeing, not proof of parental wrongdoing.

- Ask what tasks happen, how often and with what impact.
- Offer parent access and child support promptly.
- Escalate safeguarding concerns according to actual risk and local thresholds.

SCENARIO AND RESPONSE

A receptionist asks a 12-year-old to translate a medical letter. Staff should stop, identify the adult's communication preference, secure qualified support and explain any delay or urgent interim plan directly to the adult.

Service readiness checklist

An accessible service should have proactive systems that work when a family arrives unexpectedly, needs an urgent call or requests a follow-up explanation.

- Interpreter procurement and emergency alternatives documented.
- Front-line staff know the escalation contact.
- Appointments, consent and complaints can all be completed without a child interpreting.
- Communication failures are logged and used to improve provision.

Professional references and further reading

Equality Act 2010 / reasonable adjustment guidance (Great Britain) — <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty>

NHS England, Accessible Information Standard (2025 revision) — <https://www.england.nhs.uk/accessible-information-standard/>

Irish Sign Language Act 2017, sections 3, 6 and 7 (Ireland) — <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/40/enacted/en/html>

PUBLICATION REVIEW NOTE

For public publication, arrange review by suitably experienced Deaf community representatives, CODAs and the relevant education, clinical or safeguarding leads. Re-check current law, policy and organisational procedures at the time of use.