



PARENTS & FAMILIES / FREE RESOURCE

CODAs and Family Interpreting

Understanding helpful boundaries and adult responsibility.

FOR: Deaf parents, carers, families and professionals

Children may naturally communicate across languages within their families. This guide distinguishes everyday family help from interpreting that belongs with trained adults.

Every family is different. Every CODA story matters.

Communication at home

There is a difference between everyday help and high-stakes interpreting.

Ordinary family life

Children sometimes explain a television joke, help with a casual conversation or switch between languages. Families can make their own age-appropriate decisions about routine tasks.

When adults should arrange support

Medical appointments, legal matters, safeguarding meetings, financial decisions and important school discussions can involve complex information, confidentiality and power differences. Where interpretation is required, an appropriately qualified professional should be arranged rather than expecting a child to interpret.

Why the boundary matters

Children may lack the specialist vocabulary or freedom to step away. They should not carry responsibility for accuracy or for communicating serious adult decisions. This is about supporting both parents' rights and children's wellbeing.

Deaf parents are entitled to be included directly in important decisions. The child should not become the default communication channel.

Supportive family boundaries

Clear expectations help children enjoy childhood.

Useful phrases for adults

- “We will ask for an interpreter for this appointment.”
- “You do not have to explain this for us.”
- “Thank you for helping, but this is an adult responsibility.”

Useful phrases for children

- “Could you arrange an interpreter, please?”
- “I am not comfortable interpreting this.”
- “Please speak directly to my parent.”

Preparing for appointments

Ask the service how to request qualified interpreting or other appropriate communication access. Confirm arrangements ahead of time, especially for sensitive appointments.

If a child already feels responsible

Offer reassurance without blame. Make an achievable plan for future appointments and ask services what support they can provide.

Your notes or next steps

What situations should always have adult-arranged communication support?

Which services should we contact about accessible appointments?

Checklist: before an important meeting

A quick reminder for families and professionals.

Before the meeting

- Ask the Deaf adult what access method works best.
- Book appropriate professional interpreting or other communication support where necessary.
- Confirm how private or sensitive information will be handled.

During the meeting

- Address the Deaf adult directly.
- Do not ask a child to interpret or explain adult decisions.
- Allow time to check understanding and ask questions.

After the meeting

Provide accessible follow-up information through the agreed method. Where services fail to arrange appropriate access, raise this directly with the service's accessibility or complaints route.

This is general guidance. Individual services should follow their own legal duties, accessibility standards and safeguarding policies.