



SEIB Interpreter Bank

Guide for Trauma-Informed Interpreters

What to Expect | Expectations | Emotional Wellbeing

OUR COMMITMENT

At Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center, we believe language is not just communication—it is **safety, dignity, and access to justice**. As an interpreter, you are not only conveying words. You are helping a survivor be heard in the language where their truth lives.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS WORK

As part of the SEIB Interpreter Bank, you will be called to interpret in situations that may involve:

- Domestic or sexual violence
- Children and families in crisis
- Conversations that include explicit language about the body, violence, or abuse
- Emotional, fragmented, or difficult-to-follow narratives

At times, you may hear:

- Silence
- Fear or hesitation
- Strong emotions
- Descriptions that are direct, graphic, or deeply personal

This work can be **intense and emotionally demanding**. It is also deeply meaningful. You are not expected to be unaffected. You are expected to be **prepared, supported, and grounded**.

YOUR ROLE AS AN INTERPRETER

Your role is to faithfully carry meaning—not to change, soften, explain, or protect others from the content.

You are expected to:

- Interpret everything that is said, exactly as expressed
- Maintain the speaker's tone, emotion, and intent
- Use first person interpretation
- Preserve accuracy over comfort

Even when the content is difficult, your consistency creates **trust and safety**.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

To protect both the survivor and yourself, clear boundaries are essential.

You are expected to:

- Remain neutral and non-reactive (verbally and non-verbally)
- Avoid side conversations with clients or staff
- Not explain, advise, or advocate during interpretation
- Not modify questions, even if they feel uncomfortable
- Pause and request clarification when needed

Neutrality includes avoiding visible reactions such as sighing, facial expressions, or changes in tone. Your presence should feel **steady, predictable, and safe**.

WORKING WITH TRAUMA: WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU

Interpreting in trauma settings is different.

Survivors may:

- Use fragmented language
- Shift timelines
- Use slang or culturally specific terms
- Express intense emotions or long silences

You are expected to:

- Interpret without organizing or correcting their narrative
- Allow space for pauses and emotions
- Respect that meaning is not always linear
- Avoid filling silence or “helping” the speaker

LANGUAGE EQUITY AND INTERPRETER RESPONSIBILITY

As part of the SEIB Interpreter Bank, interpreters understand that interpretation is provided **equally for all parties in the conversation**.

This means:

- Interpretation is not only for the Spanish monolingual individual
- Both monolingual parties have equal access to communication
- No voice is prioritized over another based on language



You are expected to:

- Interpret everything that is said by **both parties**, without omission
- Ensure that the same information is accessible in both languages
- Not give more voice, time, or emphasis to the dominant language
- Maintain balance and equity in communication at all times

Your role is to create a space where: **everyone is equally heard and equally understood**

Your role is not to make the story clearer.
Your role is to make it **heard as it is**.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

In Latino communities, trauma may be expressed through:

- Indirect language
- Shame or hesitation
- Cultural terms for body, relationships, or violence

You are expected to:

- Preserve culturally specific language whenever possible
- Interpret meaning without altering content
- Ask for clarification instead of assuming

You are part of creating a space where survivors feel: **"I can speak the way I know how."**

AFTER THE ASSIGNMENT: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Once the session is completed:

- You may be asked to confirm your time of service
- You may receive a request for a signature or evaluation form
- You are expected to submit your invoice in a timely manner

This helps ensure accurate documentation and timely processing.

MANAGING EMOTIONAL IMPACT (TRAUMA STEWARDSHIP)

Hearing trauma can impact you. This is called **vicarious trauma—and it is real**.

You may notice:

- Emotional heaviness
- Difficulty disconnecting after a session
- Irritability, fatigue, or numbness

You are expected to:

- Recognize your emotional responses without judgment
- Avoid suppressing or ignoring distress
- Seek support when needed

This is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign that you are present and human.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Interpreters in our program are expected to:

- Notice when something stays with you
- Set internal boundaries:
"This is not my story to carry"
- Use grounding practices after sessions
- Know when to step back and ask for support

Taking care of yourself is part of your role—not separate from it.

SUPPORT AND DEBRIEFING

If you would like to process what you heard after an assignment:

- Speak with the **Language Access Coordinator** after the session (once the survivor has left)
- If the assignment was virtual:
 - Call: **888-969-1825**
 - Email: seib@latinosenvirginia.org

You do not have to carry this work alone.

CONFIDENTIALITY IN PROCESSING

When seeking support:

- Do not share identifying information
- Focus on your emotional experience, not case details
- Protect the dignity and privacy of all individuals involved

FINAL REFLECTION

Because of your work:

- A survivor is understood
- A child is believed
- A family finds a path forward

Your presence allows someone to say: **"Ahora sí me pueden escuchar."**