



This paper offers an overview of why utilization of family members or friends as interpreters is not recommended. This is not an exhaustive listing.

- 1) **Family members are not neutral** and will have fundamental biases that may interfere with treatment.
 - a. The therapist will have no measure to separate responses from the client from those of the family member. (The family member may respond for the client vs. interpret for the client).
 - b. The client may not be open and honest when family members are present.
- 2) **Not all family members are sign fluent** or even comprehensible in sign.
 - a. Knowing sign language fluently is not equivalent to the skill set required for interpreting.
 - b. Conversational skills (in sign language) do not equate to the ability to utilize technical jargon.
 - c. Cognitive bias may prohibit the family member or friend from understanding their own sign language/interpreting abilities.
- 3) **Younger family members** will not have the world experiences or knowledge base to appropriately convey information.
 - a. The seriousness of mental health appointments may cause the child (or even adult family member) to become traumatized.
 - b. Utilization of children can contribute to a family dynamic in which the child may assume the parent role.
 - c. Family members may be dealing with their own trauma or intergenerational trauma that is exacerbated by the session.
- 4) **Confidentiality** is not guaranteed.
- 5) **The federal law**, Americans with Disabilities Act,
 - a. Requires the use of qualified interpreters
 - b. Discourages the use of family members, even if they are qualified.
 - c. Holds that the agency/therapist is legally responsible for the content of the message. Relying on family members who may be unskilled or biased may increase liability.
- 6) **Alabama DMH Community Standards and DMH policy** specifies that
 - a. Interpreters must be qualified, with QMHI certified interpreters preferred.
 - b. Individuals under the age of 18 may not be used as interpreters.