Child Language Brokering

SETTLEMENT PRACTITIONER'S TOOLKIT

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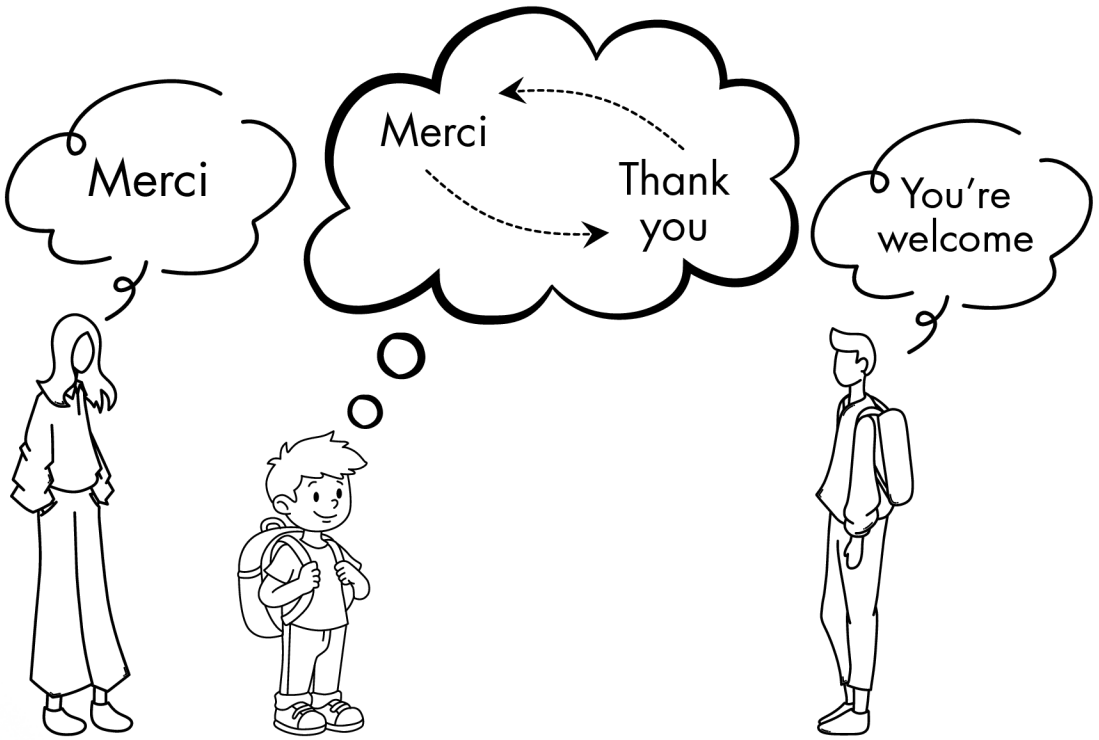
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WHAT IS CHILD LANGUAGE BROKERING?

Child Language Brokering (CLB) is when children, teenagers, and young adults help their family members by translating or interpreting language in everyday situations (e.g., school, stores, restaurants, doctor's office, during appointments, or with paperwork). CLB commonly occurs within newcomer and immigrant families.



INVOLVING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON AS A LANGUAGE BROKER

There can be many positive outcomes for family members when children or young people act as language brokers. However, each situation should be evaluated to determine if there is potential for affecting the young person negatively. The following are questions you can ask to make this determination:

- ☐ **Is the topic to be brokered developmentally inappropriate for the child?**
- ☐ **Is the topic or situation of a sensitive nature?**
- ☐ **Does it have the potential to become tense or embarrassing for the parent or the child?**
- ☐ **Could the issue potentially involve emergency services (e.g., police, firefighters, paramedics)?**
- ☐ **Is the child the topic of the discussion (e.g., a teacher providing criticism about the child to the parent)?**
- ☐ **Will the parent require more than translation (e.g., will they need an explanation on how a system or process works, will they have to fill documents, etc.)?**

REMEMBER:
A child language broker might be the only option either because an adult interpreter is not available, the parent refuses, or the above conditions do not apply to the language brokering situation.

If you believe one or more of the above is possible, then try to arrange for: **1) a formal interpreter**, **2) a staff member**, or **3) a volunteer from your organization** to help translate/interpret. If this is not possible, ask the parent if they know of another adult (a friend or a family member) who could accompany and translate/interpret for them.

Children or young persons as language brokers might:

- ☐ feel as if they bear the brunt of racist and xenophobic attitudes due to their role as language brokers.
- ☐ be apprehensive about being language brokers due to past negative experiences.

EXAMPLE SITUATION:
A girl is in an expensive store with her grandmother and the sales person approached them and asked if "she was sure her grandma wanted to be there."

- ☐ not enjoy using their first language or showing their culture of origin due to xenophobic or racist attitudes.
- ☐ have feelings of frustration towards their parents and perceive them as incapable of acculturating.
- ☐ not be emotionally removed from the situation like a formal interpreter would.
- ☐ feel awkward translating highly personal details about their parents or family members.
- ☐ feel ill-equipped to provide translation in formal settings.
- ☐ feel uncomfortable because they often do more than translation; they explain expectations, processes, culture, contexts, etc.

Parents of child language brokers might:

- ☐ believe the children will better understand the situation and be more capable of advocating for the family rather than a formal interpreter.
- ☐ prefer to keep the issues "within the family" and be apprehensive about sharing personal information with an unfamiliar interpreter.
- ☐ see children's participation in language brokering as part of a collaborative family effort.
- ☐ be worried about role reversal or feel removed from the situation.
- ☐ be experiencing feelings of anxiety or frustration about their inability to speak the language and having to depend on their child for communication.



BEST PRACTICES WHEN WORKING WITH CHILD LANGUAGE BROKERS

Before the meeting:

☐ **Schedule enough time for the meeting.**

- Meetings with interpreters take longer, often double the regular time.
- Children should have enough time to think without pressure.
- Parents may require additional explanations beyond just translation of information.

☐ **Arrange for a separate space for the meeting if possible.**

- The child might feel embarrassed or self-conscious if interpreting in front of other people.
- This might also put children and parents at ease if they are feeling nervous or anxious.

SITUATION:
A child interprets at the bank and feels pressured by the other people in line because "they were taking too long." The parent doesn't speak English.

☐ **Encourage the parent to discuss the nature of the language brokering situation in advance with the child (e.g., what kinds of questions they may be asked, how they might respond, etc.)**

☐ **Talk to the child in advance to prepare them for the situation (e.g., who will be involved, etc.)**

☐ **Find out if the child is an experienced language broker or not:**

- Have they helped their parents with language brokering before?
  - In what contexts or situations?
- How did the child feel about language brokering?

☐ **If the child is an experienced language broker, ask if they have any preferences, as children tend to develop their own ways of translating/interpreting.**

☐ **Discuss with the parent what is likely to be accomplished so the parent has realistic expectations.**

☐ **Explain to the parent that the child might not understand everything.**

☐ **Remind the child to stay calm and take their time. If the child cannot remember all the details, let them know that translating the general idea is fine, and if they don't understand something, they can ask the other person to repeat or explain again.**

During the meeting:

- [ ] **Start the meeting with a positive interaction or comment.**

You can say:

Thank you for being here to help us!

- [ ] **Acknowledge the child's presence, participation, and contribution to the overall situation.**

EXAMPLE SITUATION:
Teacher sends child off, however the child stays nearby, pretends to read a book while secretly listening to the conversation between a parent and a teacher to translate later at home.

You can say:

Thank you for translating! It is really helpful to have you here.

You can say:

I see how hard you are trying, thank you for your help.

- [ ] **Remind adults to avoid talking over each other and to use short sentences. This is especially important if the child is a first-time language broker.**

☐ When a child is language brokering, make an effort to address the both the child and the parent.

- Parents might worry that the parental role is being reversed.
- Some parents might feel it is inappropriate/disrespectful for a young person to interact with other adults.
- If there are other adults present, encourage them to acknowledge everyone as well.

☐ Monitor the following:

- Is the discussion becoming more sensitive or delicate?
  - If so, then…
    - intervene and shift the conversation back,
    - remind the adult of the meeting objective, and/or
    - inform the adult to be mindful that the discussion is becoming sensitive.
- Is the child trying to calm the parent?
  - If so, then…
    - intervene on behalf of the child and calm the parent (e.g., validating the parent's frustration).
- Does the child seem confused or in need of help?
  - If so, then…
    - remind adults to use short sentences and simple language.
  - You can also ask the child if there are any concepts/words from their first language that they have difficulty translating into English (or vice versa).
    - Sometimes there is no equivalent translation of a word or concept, and the language broker may have to create one on the spot.

After the meeting:

- [ ] **Provide praise to the child; ask how they felt during interpreting, if there is anything they are unsure of, and if there was anything that made the task of interpreting more difficult.**

You can say:

You did an amazing job! Thank you for helping us communicate.

You can say:

How are you feeling now that the appointment is about to end?

You can say:

Is there anything you want me to explain again?

- [ ] **Debrief with the parent. Did the parent understand what was translated? Do they know what to do next? How are they feeling?**

You can say:

Do you want me to repeat anything I said in today's appointment?

You can say:

Do you have everything you need to know before you leave today?

- [ ] **Make referrals and/or recommendations if the family needs additional support.**

REFERENCES

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