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Hey Shawnta! How Can I
Connect With Parents When I
Don't Speak Their Primary
Language?

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Hey Shawnta!

How can I connect with parents when I don't speak their primary language?

Sincerely,

Lost in Translation

Hi Lost in Translation,

I think it's great that you're already thinking about how to communicate with parents of all backgrounds, including linguistically diverse parents. Even when parents do not speak English, they want to have an active role in their children's education.

1. Don't Make Assumptions

First, don't assume that parents cannot speak English. Work with the ELL (English Language Learner) teacher to find out which parents are not English speakers.

2. Find Out What Translation & Interpretation Services Are Available

Next, find out the process for scheduling translation and interpretation services. Most schools have an accessible resource for Spanish, but other languages might take some forethought, especially if your school uses an external translation and

interpretation service. Also, staff providing these services might not always do both. If you need both translation and interpretation, make sure to double-check.

If at all possible, don't use the child. The child should be able to stay in his or her role as a student and not be completing a compensated role such as translating or interpreting at a meeting.

Speaking of compensation, when schools use external companies, those people get paid! Even if a colleague down the hall speaks the parents' language, and even if the colleague states not minding being asked, verify if this is a task your colleague will be compensated for. If not, do not accept their offer.

3. Make Genuine Connections With Parents

Finally, look at the parent(s) when an interpreter is talking. An interpreter is a tool, not the person with whom you are connecting. Look at the parent(s) and make eye contact the same as you would in any other parent conference.

Hopefully, these tips will clear up your communication channels, and you won't stay stuck — lost in translation.

Shawnta