



The Anxieties of Language Brokering

Translating from a young age...

From an early age, many children from immigrant households help their families with language barrier issues by becoming translators during crucial times like visiting doctors, lawyers, or during parent-teacher conferences.

The impact of language brokering

Growing up with non-English speaking family members can come with a big sense of responsibility for bilingual children. Parents rely on their kids to translate legal documents, bills, medical terminology, and bank statements. This becomes more complex when indigenous communities do not speak their country's primary language, making it much more difficult to find translators. That task can take a huge mental health toll on the children, creating an emotionally and physically distressing environment for them. They can develop anxiety or depressive episodes, as well physical issues like stomach pain and headaches. Translating terminology that is complex can cause fear and anxiety of not translating accurately. Children are prone to maturing earlier because the information can be heavy and sensitive. This creates worries for kids who are exposed to finances and other adult-like information that most children are shielded from.

Reminder to the self

"How special is it to be able to share space with a family that embodies such multitudes? The layers of history and culture that they carry brings texture and color to your life that many other kids your age will not have the privilege of knowing or understanding. You're doing your part in bridging your world with theirs when you take the time to fill in the gaps and translate for them in public and private settings."

- Krista Cantrell

Active Minds, Send Silence Packing Manager

What to do?

Before assisting a family member with translation, **contact the place of meeting beforehand** to request a professional interpreter.

Utilize free resources to aid your translation such as [USA Hello](#) or [DeepL Translate](#).

Advocate for pre-translated documents at your school, medical centers, banks, etc.

Applaud yourself for being able to be the mediator between professionals and your family!

“Being tasked with translating for my parents as early as the age of 7 brought on a lot of responsibility and anxiety. I felt pressure to make sure what I was translating was correct. There were times where I didn't even know certain words or phrases they wanted me to translate! It was tough when I was younger, but it truly helped my family a lot, and I was able to be a connection to America for them.”

- Lilian Garcia

Active Minds, Human Resources Associate