

# PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS



## Why is this important:

The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) estimates that one in four construction workers in the U.S. are non-English speakers or have limited English proficiency. The great majority of these individuals are Spanish speakers. OSHA requires that ALL workers understand safety information—not just receive it. Construction jobsite leaders need practical, jobsite ready solutions to ensure non-English-speaking workers are adequately welcomed, understood, and that they understand safety information.

## How to use this worksheet:

Use the daily practice actions below as reminders and share them with others on your team who can also support non-English speakers. These practices help to keep your crew safe and create an inclusive atmosphere on the job. The link at the end of this document sends you to a series of construction-focused toolbox talks and supplemental training programs, each with downloadable English and Spanish versions that you can use to help build your confidence and vocabulary towards being welcoming towards non-English speakers.

## COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND SIMPLY

### ON EVERY JOB

- Use plain language (short sentences, common words)
- Avoid idioms, slang, and jargon; instead of: “Ballpark estimate” → Use: “Rough estimate”
- Speak slower, not louder
- Demonstrate tasks physically whenever possible



### YOUR ACTIONS

- Check if key safety points are clear visually and verbally
- Use visual tools: pictures, diagrams, color-coded labels
- Hand signals for common hazards
- Tool and equipment photos with names

## IMPLEMENT A VOLUNTARY BUDDY SYSTEM

### ON EVERY JOB

- Pair non-English speakers with a trusted, experienced coworker
- Buddies help with:
  - Safety instructions
  - Daily task clarification
  - Reporting hazards or concerns



### YOUR ACTIONS

- Identify bilingual employees willing to assist
- Use them as support, not the sole communicator
- Do not assign translator duties without consent or compensation

## RESPECT CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

### ON EVERY JOB

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Keep voice low and steady
- Avoid sarcasm or blame
- Avoid interrupting
- Do not maintain constant eye contact



### YOUR ACTIONS

- Learn correct name pronunciation
- Show patience with language learning curves
- Be aware that some cultures discourage speaking up to authority

## SUPPORT ENGLISH SKILL DEVELOPMENT LONG-TERM

### ON EVERY JOB

- Share information about ESL (English as a Second Language) classes
- Partner with HR or local workforce programs
- Allow schedule flexibility where feasible



### YOUR ACTIONS

- Do not enforce English-only policies unless clearly job-related and necessary for safety
- Be aware: broad English-only rules may be unlawful under EEOC and U.S. Department of Labor guidance

## LEADER'S DAILY SELF-CHECK

Before the shift ends, ask yourself:

- Did everyone understand today's work and safety expectations?
- Did I rely on showing, not just telling?
- Did I create space for questions?
- Did anyone seem confused but not speak up?
- Did I prevent mock accents, grammar, or pronunciation?
- Did I stop work immediately if language confusion could create risk?

Use the [CPWR Toolbox Talks Series](#) to communicate about safety with Spanish speaking workers