

Dentistry – intervention in cases of Domestic Violence

What do I need to know?

Domestic Violence, whether psychological, physical or sexual, affects many people. Child neglect is a common, yet often overlooked, form of domestic violence and a significant cause of child endangerment.

Dentists play a special role in identifying those affected: they see their patients regularly, often alone. Examining the head, neck and mouth area can reveal early signs of potential violence.

This card provides information on relevant indicators and the appropriate procedures to follow in suspected cases, as well as guidance on legally compliant medical documentation of findings. Photos support the medical documentation of injuries, as well as damage to clothing and medical aids. Written consent from the patient is required and can be withdrawn at any time.

Important indicators in the head, neck and mouth area:

- ▶ **Facial trauma:** Be aware for signs of previous trauma to the teeth or face, such as healed fractures on X-rays, tears in the frenulum that have no obvious cause, fractured or dislocated teeth, and injuries in various stages of healing.
- ▶ **Untreated tooth decay may indicate dental neglect in children.** Indicators include:
 - conspicuous behaviour (e.g. aggressiveness or passivity).
 - inadequate care and malnutrition
 - early childhood caries from the time of tooth eruption onwards

Some sample wording to get the conversation started:

- "Do you feel safe in your current home environment?"
- "Since Domestic Violence is unfortunately so common in our society, I ask all my patients about it."
- "If you wish, you can talk to me in confidence. I can inform you about further counselling and support services."

Counselling and help for professionals and those affected:

- Women who have been victims of violence will receive help and advice free of charge across Europe: EU-wide hotline: 116 016

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Forensic Dental Documentation in Domestic Violence

- ▶ Document everything carefully in case it is needed for legal purposes.
- ▶ Always use a standardised documentation form and evidence collection kit.
- ▶ Obtain consent from the person concerned or their guardian prior to carrying out the investigation.

1. Basic documentation

- **Patient details:** Name, date of birth, address
- **Details of the examination:**
- **Where?** Place of examination (practice/emergency room clinic).
- **When?** Date & time of the examination
- **Who?** Name of the examiner
- **Other persons present?**

2. Event/patient details

Create a calm and undisturbed environment for discussion and examination (be alone with the patient). Ask open, direct questions and respect any refusal to provide information. Take verbatim notes of the statements.

- **Where** (place) and **when** (date, time) has **what** occurred?
- **Perpetrator:** unknown/known? Number? Who?
- Body height and weight
- Habitus; mental condition (describe, do not judge); special features (e.g., pregnancy, disability, illnesses).
- Conversation with patient about violence (yes/no)

3. Extraoral findings

- **Facial skin:** haemorrhages, wounds, abrasions, pattern impressions and petechiae
- **Eyes, eyelids, conjunctiva and eyeball** (monocular haematoma, petechiae, spectacle haematoma, extensive haemorrhages and visual disturbances/double vision)
- **Nasal swelling** (nosebleeds, nasal obstruction)
- **Neck; Ears/**behind ear region (blood underflow, hearing impairment)
- **Lip mucosa/red lip** (haemorrhages, tears, petechiae)
- **Fractures to the skull and face** (e.g. zygomatic bone or jaw)

4. Intraoral findings

- Tooth fractures, dislocations and prosthesis fractures
- Maxillary or lower jaw fracture (e.g. crepitation or luxation).
- Injuries to the buccal and pharyngeal mucosa and tongue (possibly causing swallowing disorders).
- **Dental status**

5. Additional observations and findings

Record any visible or described injuries outside of the oral cavity, such as haematomas, wounds, swelling, bite marks, visual disturbances, limping, dizziness and nausea.

- **Where?** Localisation (especially the head, face and neck area).
- **What?** Type of injury (e.g. haematoma or laceration).
- **How?** Size, shape, colour and depth.