

# Quick Tips for the Dental Office



## Reporting Abuse

### Elder Abuse

Unlike suspected child abuse, dentists are not mandatory reporters for suspected elder abuse. However, there may be times in your practice where you see potential signs of abuse and are unsure what to do.

Elder abuse occurs when somebody harms, neglects or exploits an older or care-dependent person. Unfortunately, crimes against the elderly are increasing in Pennsylvania. Seniors may be vulnerable, or suffering from dementia, and unable to defend themselves. In addition, not all abuse is physical, and seniors may also find themselves the victim of financial abuse.

Victims of abuse may be too afraid or embarrassed to report that they are being abused, especially if the abuser is a caregiver or family member. As healthcare providers, it is important to be aware of potential warning signs of abuse or neglect, which can include:

- Dehydration or malnutrition not related to a medical condition
- Unexplained weight loss
- Poor hygiene
- Displaying signs of trauma, like rocking back and forth
- Unexplained bruises, burns, cuts or scars
- Refusal or reluctance to see a healthcare provider for injuries
- Depression or sudden changes in mood, appearing withdrawn or refusing to speak
- Infections
- Unexplained withdrawals from bank accounts, missing documents or unpaid bills

Any person who suspects that an older adult is being abused, neglected, exploited or abandoned can call the elder abuse hotline, which is available 24 hours a day, at 1-800-490-8505.

For more information and resources on reporting elder abuse, you can visit the Pennsylvania Department of Aging at <https://www.aging.pa.gov/aging-services/Pages/Report-Elder-Abuse.aspx> or the National Center on Elder Abuse at <https://ncea.acl.gov/Resources/State.aspx#Pennsylvania>.



## Domestic Violence

Situations may arise in your office where you suspect that a patient may be the victim of domestic violence.

Abusers are skilled at using power and control over their victims, which can make leaving the situation both difficult and dangerous. One of the best ways to help somebody in a potentially abusive situation is to listen to them and support them.

If you are uncomfortable asking your patient about their relationship, you can contact the local domestic violence program in your community to discuss the situation at <https://www.pcadv.org/find-help/find-your-local-domestic-violence-program/>. This may be a safe way to share your concerns for that person's safety.

If you witness or hear a violent incident in your office, it is important not to intervene on your own. If somebody is in immediate danger, call 911. Intervening can put victims and bystanders at risk. Understand and respect that there are various reasons that not all victims will want the police involved in their situation, but if somebody's life is at risk, calling 911 is the best option.

<https://www.pcadv.org/>