

Abuse in Society

Table of Contents

Dealing with Sexual Harassment	1
<i>Harassment Policy</i>	2
Family Violence	2
<i>Raising Awareness</i>	2
<i>From Recognition to Response</i>	3
<i>Abuse and Neglect of Children</i>	3
<i>Abuse of Women</i>	3
<i>Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults</i>	3
<i>Indicators of Abuse</i>	4
The Role of the Dental Team	4

DEALING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT

If you believe that you are being sexually harassed at your place of employment you should seriously consider your options for addressing the situation. Both informal and formal complaint options should be investigated. Informal complaint options are those that are brought to an employer or manager's attention but are generally not written and do not result in an investigation. Formal complaints require you to present your complaint in writing and result in an investigation. You should examine both options and decide which would be most likely to stop the harassment and which one you are most comfortable with.

You will probably start by attempting to deal with the situation personally. There are both positive and negative factors to consider when you attempt to stop the harassment yourself:

- You keep more control over what happens.
- You may be able to stop the harassment without further, serious action.
- Friendships and working relationships may become strained.
- Handling it yourself generally means there is no record of the incident and no official response.
- You may not be able to stop the harassing behavior.
- You may not be taken seriously and may not be supported by friends and family.

If your personal attempts to deal with the harassment do not work, or you feel you can not confront the situation yourself, consider the following options:

- Talk to someone in authority and discuss what actions can be taken to resolve the situation. If the harasser is your boss it may be necessary to contact Saskatchewan Health and Safety to determine if there has been a violation of *The Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
- Contact the Saskatchewan Dental Assistant's Association. As your licensing body and authority we will do our best to support you and advise you on any actions you consider taking.
- Contact local police or the RCMP. Consider the possibility of laying criminal charges if the harassment is a violation of *The Criminal Code*.

The following points are important to consider when deciding to proceed with a formal complaint:

- The investigative process conducted following a formal complaint; are predetermined and out of your control.
- The process can be very demanding and may take months or even years to resolve the situation.
- Once you have filed a formal complaint you may be unsupported and resented by your co-workers.
- You may be required to hire a lawyer and pay legal fees.
- The investigation may not result in the outcome that you hope for, and create new problems in your employment situation.

Regardless of which option you decide to proceed with, you should consider the following points provided by The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission:

- Trust your instincts – if someone’s behavior makes you feel uncomfortable, do not ignore it. Consider that your instincts are probably right and remember not to blame yourself for what is happening.
- Keep a record – even if you are unsure about your course of action, keep detailed records of incidents as they occur. Include information such as date, time, place, names of witnesses, what happened, and what was said. Keep any notes or pictures the harasser may have given you and try to find any witnesses that will verify your version of the event.
- Get support – you probably are under an incredible amount of stress right now. Do not try to deal with it alone, try talking to someone, a friend or spouse, a supportive co-worker. Sharing your feelings and concerns can help ease feelings of isolation and self-blame.
- Know your rights – learning about your rights and options will empower you and make sure that the situation is resolved in a way that you are comfortable with. Get as much information as you can about all your options so that you can make an informed decision about how to proceed.
- Keep a record of your actions – as you attempt to stop the harassment, document all the steps you take, including specific facts and dates. These details will be helpful if you decide to go forward with a formal complaint.
- If you leave your place of employment because of harassment, put your reasons in writing and keep a copy of the letter.
- Confront your harasser – it may be very difficult for you but if you are able, it may make you feel that you have been heard and had a chance to express your feelings, and may make the harasser realize the pain they have caused.
 - Express your objections by talking face to face.
 - Clearly identify the offensive behavior and explain how it makes you feel.
 - Use assertive body language that demonstrates that you are confident – make direct eye contact; use a strong, clear speaking voice; do not smile or touch the harasser.
 - Use the “broken record” technique if the harasser tries to raise irrelevant issues – remain focused on your point and keep repeating it calmly and clearly.
 - Consider sending a letter to the harasser explaining the behavior that you object to, why you object to it, how you want the behavior to change and if it doesn’t change, the steps you will take next. This can also be used as a follow-up to a verbal confrontation. Keep a copy of the letter for yourself.
 - Consider leaving pamphlets or information on sexual harassment around the office.
 - Consider having someone come with you when confronting the harasser or when delivering the written message. This provides a witness to the actions that you have taken to address the situation. The harasser can not claim ignorance if you have raised your concerns verbally or in writing in the presence of a witness.

HARASSMENT POLICY

- Women’s Secretariat has an harassment guide
- Further information is available through Saskatchewan Labour. Their publication “Preventing Harassment at Work” is available at 1-800-667-5023
- Human Rights Commission has a video and lending library. Contact through www.labour.gov.sk.ca

FAMILY VIOLENCE

RAISING AWARENESS

In recent years family violence has been recognized as a major health problem as well as a serious social issue. The need for all health care professionals to recognize the impact of family violence on patient care has become a reality.

Members of the dental community are acknowledging that they too are in a position to take a proactive role to end violence in the family.

Violence in the family is not new. What is new is that family violence, in particular violence against women by their partners, has been named and made public. As a result, Canadian laws and institutional practices are beginning to support the belief that violence against anyone is unacceptable.

The term family violence refers to abuse that takes place in the family, in an intimate relationship, or in a situation of dependency or trust. The abuse may be:

- physical
- emotional
- sexual
- neglect and financial exploitation are other types of abuse.

Such abuse takes many forms, including abuse and neglect of children, abuse of women, abuse and neglect of older adults, and dating violence. Family violence is the abuse of power to control the more vulnerable individuals in relationships of kinship, intimacy, dependency or trust.

Studies demonstrate that violence in the family does not stop until there is outside intervention. Prevention, identification and intervention in situations of family violence must be a part of all health care, including dental health services. The particular skills, ongoing relationships with patients, and interactions with all age groups make it possible for the dental health team to identify and provide assistance to patients who are being abused.

FROM RECOGNITION TO RESPONSE

As awareness of the issue of family violence increases you will begin to develop a better understanding of your client's lives outside the dental office. You will be in a better position to treat them, support them and link them to community resources if they are victims of family violence.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN

Child abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of a child by a parent, guardian or caregiver that results in injury or significant emotional or psychological harm to the child. It may involve:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- neglect

ABUSE OF WOMEN

Includes physical abuse, sexual assault, emotional, psychological intimidation, degradation, devaluation or exploitation of women in an intimate relationship. The abuse may be:

- physical
- sexual
- psychological
- financial

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS

Abuse and neglect of older adults refers to any action or interaction that threatens the well being of an older person. Neglecting the needs of an older person is abuse. Abuse may be:

- physical

- emotional
- sexual
- financial

INDICATORS OF ABUSE

None of the indicators on their own can tell you if a client is being abused, but rather should alert you to the possibility.

- fractured and broken teeth
- oral lacerations
- fractures and dislocations of the jaw
- bruising of the face
- adult bite marks
- black eyes
- injuries to bone or soft tissue
- hair loss
- severe periodontal disease
- enamel erosion which may result from the effects of bulimia or prolonged sperm containment in the mouth
- overly withdrawn and fearful children who avoid being noticed by adults
- excessive nervous, anxious or eager to please child
- uncharacteristically aggressive, violent child who shows uncontrolled rage
- excessive gagging when objects are placed in the mouth
- parent-child interactions in which the parent is striking or verbally abusive
- depression
- delay of treatment
- poor self-care, nutrition and neglect of oral health
- reluctance to obtain treatment
- ill fitting dentures

Very few cases of abuse are easily detected. The most frequent and difficult situation encountered by dental health professionals is the situation in which you are unsure weather to report after examining all aspects of the case. Consultation with another colleague, physician or social worker can be very helpful. Local child welfare workers have extensive training and assessment skills. Consult them about your situation, and ask for advice.

THE ROLE OF THE DENTAL TEAM

Dental professionals are in a special position to detect and support an abused client.

Consider that:

- Over 50% of injuries associated with child abuse are to the face and head. An aware dental team is in a good position to detect abuse.
- Dental health care professionals may be the only health care providers to see an abused child or woman on a regular basis. An abusive parent, caregiver or spouse may move from one doctor to another but continue treatment with the same dental office.
- The dental team has the opportunity to view evidence of trauma, parent-child interactions and changes in a client's behavior over a period of time.
- As health care providers, members of the dental team have a moral and professional obligation to:
 - Increase their awareness of the issue of family abuse.
 - Look for and recognize the indicators of family violence.
 - Understand the legal requirements for reporting abuse.
 - Know how to access the community support services for children and their families.

It is required by child protection law Canada that persons must report cases of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect of a child to a child and family services authority. There is no liability for a person making a report. It is important to remember that the purpose of reporting is to help, not to punish. Protection for the child, and resources and support for the family, is the intent of the legislation.

Wife assault is a crime under the criminal code of Canada. There are no legislated requirements for health care professionals to report adult abuse. The decision to report and press charges is up to the victim. Adults are presumed competent and capable of making decisions for themselves.

Abuse of older adults is a crime under the criminal code of Canada. In regards to reporting there is always a question of competency when dealing with older adults. In some provinces, there are legislated requirements for health professionals to report abuse/neglect. Saskatchewan does not have this legislation. If you suspect abuse, contact social services.

If you make a report of child abuse or assist an adult in making a report, it is very important to document all the findings and to report detailed observations. Be sure to include a complete dental record of the injuries, any behavioral indicators, and medical history.

Information from Family Violence Handbook for the Dental Community, December, 1994