



Trauma Informed Dental Care

If you are a survivor of trauma, you may find that accessing dental care is a very difficult experience. It may cause you to avoid care in general and it may prevent you from getting essential care you need.

Below is information you may share with your dental care provider to advocate for yourself and assist your provider in understanding trauma symptoms during an appointment or procedure.

Definition for Traumatic Event: *Individual trauma results from an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.*

Three 'E's: Events, Experience, Effects

Why is dental care potentially stressful for children and adults?

- Invasiveness of procedure
- Vulnerability
- Replicates power and control of past or current abusive relationship
- Replicates feelings of helplessness

Possible Triggers in Dental Settings:

- Drilling
- Water Spray
- Mouth blocked open
- X-ray apron
- Restraints
- Latex gloves
- Medical equipment
- Gender of provider
- Physical touch
- Proximity of provider

Emotional and Physical Reactions:

- Rapid heart rate and respiratory rate
- Trembling
- Aggression
- Crying
- Clinging to care giver
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Tantrums
- Dissociation

Trauma Informed Responses by Dental Care Professional:

Four 'R's: Realization, Recognize, Respond, Resists Re-traumatization

- Talk to patient before during and after
- Explain procedures prior to administration
- Flexibility with patient by letting them:
 - wear coat;
 - wear x-ray apron;
 - hold toy;
 - squeeze stress ball;
 - take breaks;
 - wear headphones
- Practice with patient soothing strategies prior to dental visit (breathing, visualization, grounding)

References:

- Franklin County Women's Research Project (2005). Trauma-informed or Trauma-denied: Principles and implementation of trauma-informed services: Survivors in Medical & Dental Settings. Journal of Community Psychology: [\(PDF\) Trauma-informed or trauma-denied: Principles and implementation of trauma-informed services for women \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Schachter, Candice (2009) Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Healthcare Practitioners: Lessons from Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. <https://www.cdho.org/docs/default-source/pdfs/reference/sensitivepractice.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) <https://www.samhsa.gov/>



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