What can your dentist do to help you?

Become aware of the potential impacts of sexual assault on oral health & dental experiences


SECASA acknowledges the voices of victim/survivors who participated in the research project ‘Bridging the Gap: The Impact of Sexual Assault on Oral Health & Dental Experiences’

Thank you; Your voices have shaped this pamphlet.

Where can you get more information:
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References
Why is your oral health important?
Reflects and influences general health & well being
Reduce chances of pain & discomfort associated with oral health problems
Oral health problems can lead to:
- difficulties with eating & speaking &
- embarrassment over teeth condition
To avoid onset of diseases: cavities, tooth decay & gum disease.
Poor oral health has been linked to:
- cardiovascular disease
- diabetes
- preterm & low birth weight babies
- stroke

How can sexual assault effect victim/survivors oral health?
The mouth, neck & head area can be a sensitive area
Fear of visiting a dentist because:
- feel powerless & vulnerable
- have limited control
- can be unpredictable
- alone with a person (usually male) who has considerable authority
Difficulty in scheduling and/or attending appointments

Some experiences can be…
Although some victim/survivors have no difficulties with attending the dentist, others report that they don't attend because they find it traumatic:

“intrusive, having things in the mouth”

“I don’t trust being so close to somebody I don’t know”

“Having someone leaning over me & not being able to talk or be in control”

“I choose not to go to the dentist... forcing my mouth open, and having instruments in my mouth, brings up gagging...memory of gagging when I was orally assaulted.”

Common reactions
Intense levels of distress and/or anxiety
Panic attacks
Uncontrollable crying
Inability to keep feet/body still
Flashbacks
Dissociation
Highly sensitive to pain
Resist opening mouth and/or turning head away
Gagging/choking
Afraid of being alone with dentist in treatment room where door is closed
Feeling trapped in the dental chair

What can you do?
Take your favourite music with you (CD, IPOD)
Use relaxation techniques (deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation)
Visualise a safe place.
Initial visit for meeting/check up
Negotiate signals to stop treatment if necessary
Ask for breaks
Negotiate the reclining angle of the dental chair