A Guide to Support Dental Patients Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence and Exploitation

Dental professionals have a unique opportunity to identify and support their patients who have experienced or are experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV), human trafficking (HT) or exploitation (E). As a result of their experiences, some people may feel a lack of control at the dental clinic (i.e. sitting back in a dental chair, having people touch them).

This resource can help you:

- Understand why dental appointments act as a trigger for some patients
- Identify protocols to implement IPV/HT/E response
- Support patients in having a better visit, including offering referrals to supportive programs

Before the dental appointment

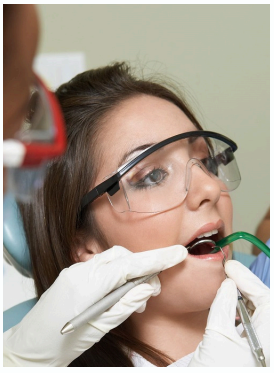
- Review the **evidence-based CUES Intervention** to initiate conversations on IPV/HT with patients.
- **Identify** and **formalize agreements** with local community partners, such as domestic violence programs.
- Engage staff in cultural humility training to understand the experiences of refugees, undocumented individuals, and asylum seekers.
- Ensure that all dental team members understand the organization's **processes and protocols**.
- Have **resources available** and ready to distribute to patients universally.
- Ensure that patients can privately **disclose IPV** to the dental team.
- Identify if an interpreter is needed and offer **educational materials** in a variety of languages.
- Consider making the dental operatory a more calming environment by playing music and encouraging patients to bring comfort items like a blanket.

During the dental appointment

- Create a more comfortable dental experience by introducing yourself and identifying your role in the patient's care.
- Provide a clear explanation of costs, insurance benefits, and confidentiality.
- Recognize that oral health care is naturally invasive and can be triggering for patients with IPV/HT/E experience.
- Initiate conversations on relationships and abuse (**see CUES**). Validate disclosures of trauma or abuse and their impact on health status.
- Listen to the patient's concerns, worries, and fears. Respect the patient's needs for breaks, discussions, and pace.
- Use the "Tell-Show-Do" approach.
- Describe recommendations and the patient's health status in clear, plain language.
- Provide care navigation and resources to help the patient schedule additional appointments or connect with a community partner.



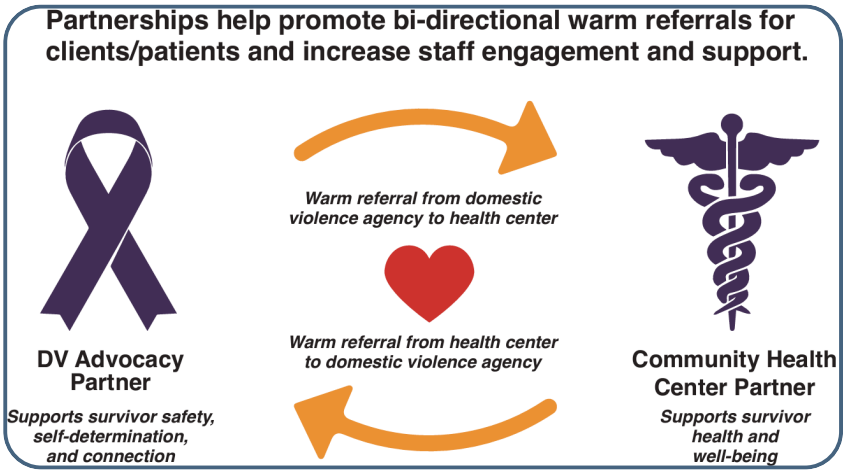




Community partnerships and referrals

Partnerships between health centers, community-based organizations, and DV advocacy programs provide benefits for health center staff, survivors, and all patients by:

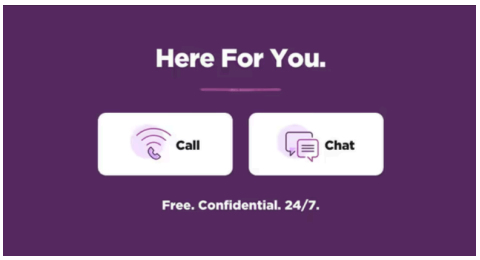
- Promoting bi-directional warm referrals.
- Increasing access to healthcare enrollment and services.
- Connecting patients and staff to DV advocates for safety planning support.
- Addressing intersecting needs like food access, legal support and housing.
- Supporting staff wellness and healing.



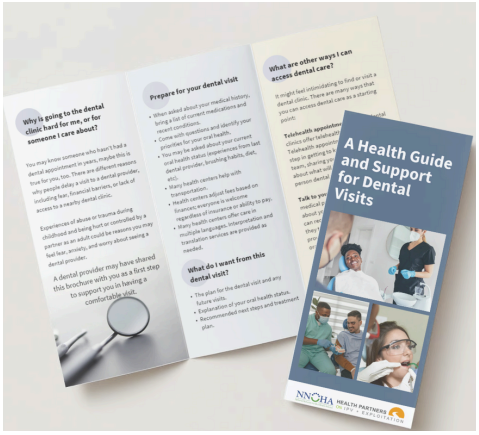
Click graphic above to view the Bi-directional Infographic tool

Resources

- Learn more about HRSA's Strategy to Address IPV.
- Webinar recording from NNOHA + Health Partners on IPVE: *Supporting Patients Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence: Opportunities for Oral Health Providers* (60 minutes).
- A patient brochure, *Health Guide and Support for Dental Visits,* for survivors of violence and abuse.
- National Hotline on Domestic Violence: Confidential relationship support 24/7/365, 800-799-7233, Text START to 88788.
- Give Back a Smile Program
  - The Give Back a Smile (GBAS) program, run by AACDCF, helps heal the severe impact of domestic and sexual violence. It restores the smiles of adult women and men who have suffered dental injuries caused by a former intimate partner, spouse, family member, or sexual assault.
- Dental Lifeline Network
  - Dental Lifeline Network provides comprehensive dental care to adults across the U.S. These patients receive this care through the generosity of a network of volunteer dentists and laboratories.
- Smiles for Success
  - Smiles for Success offers cost-free dental care to women who have completed community programs or are currently enrolled in job readiness programs with community based agencies, religious institutions or rehabilitative systems.



National Hotline on Domestic Violence



A Health Guide and Support for Dental Visits

NNOHA
National Network for Oral Health Access

HEALTH PARTNERS ON IPV + EXPLOITATION

This resource is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award to NNOHA for $550,000 and to Futures Without Violence for $650,000 with 0% percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov.
Updated 2026