

# Guest editorial

## Dental neglect and child abuse

Child abuse and caries disease are important problems in public health and affect children worldwide. Any action or omission that harms the physical and psychological well-being, the freedom and right for comprehensive development of children is considered as abuse that can be divided into physical, sexual, psychological, and negligence. The lack of basic conditions for the development of the child is considered as negligence, including dental neglect. Dental neglect is defined when the parents/legal guardians do not seek treatment for oral infections, bleeding, pain, abscesses, orofacial trauma, and caries lesions easily detectable by laypeople. Also, it includes the fact that when treatment is provided but not executed even after the instructions about the risk of untreated caries lesions. Likely to caries disease, child abuse is the result of a combination of factors, such as dysfunctional families, social-economic conditions, and behavior of the parents. Although these two health problems are different, they share common characteristics: high prevalence, risk factors, and long-term implications. Untreated dental caries not only can destroy the teeth, but also can affect the general health and the quality of life and decrease the child/teenager's self-esteem. Similarly, child abuse cause life-time damages because physical protection and basic care are essential for the physical and emotional development of the child.

By treating children and teenagers, the dentist should be aware to notice and diagnose child abuse, once 50% of physical lesions occur in the face and neck area. The dentist should check whether the physical lesion report is compatible with the clinical situation. Behavior change and improper clothes according to the temperature (e.g.: clothe covering the neck during hot days) may be signs of physical aggression.

In suspected cases of child abuse, the dentist must notify the authorities because the denunciation is not a punishment to the parents/legal guardians, but it is the hope for warranty of rights and social protection, enabling that health, education, and social assistance professionals, guardian councils, and the justice acts to stop this process.

## References

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**Estela Maris Losso, PhD**  
**Eduardo Pizzatto, PhD**  
Positivo University