



# The continued importance of dental safeguarding during the pandemic

By **Mark Foster** of the Child Protection Company

**A**s COVID-19 continues to have a huge impact on daily life, with more areas facing ever tighter restrictions, now more than ever, dental professionals are providing a vital service to the general public. You should be incredibly proud of your selfless commitment to keeping people safe and healthy during such uncertain times.

Social isolation and social distancing continue to be necessary to slow the spread

of COVID-19 until the vaccine programme reaches a point where herd immunity kicks in. However, prolonged periods of little to no contact with the outside world could prove dangerous, potentially even deadly, in some households across the United Kingdom.

Incidents of domestic abuse have seen an upsurge in 2020, as a result of families being forced together around the clock. Those children who once viewed school as an 'escape' from home have, in many cases, been essentially trapped inside with their abuser much more than they ever have been.

Understandably, this could prove to be a harrowing time for vulnerable people across the country (and, in fact, across the globe) who are victims of abuse and neglect. But as

a dental professional, you are uniquely skilled to raise the alarm and seek help for such individuals.

## The role of dental staff and the importance of safeguarding training...

Consider a scenario in which a child has shown signs of abuse (for example, bruising in non-accidental injury sites) and neglect (for example, dramatic weight loss and lethargy), which their teachers and staff at school have been keeping a close eye on for a few weeks. Perhaps reports have already been made to social services, but no solid evidence has been found yet to make a case against the child's parents.

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to go on, and there's a strong likelihood that some of these vulnerable people will be in contact for dental advice as the lockdown continues. You, as a trained professional, do have the means to notice when something isn't quite right.

It's no exaggeration to say that during this difficult time, you could quite literally save a vulnerable person's life.

#### **Knowing when to act and how to respond...**

Your dental practice will already have safeguarding policies and procedures in place for all staff to follow. These should include access to contact details of your local authority support teams, safeguarding partners, social services, and the police, plus advice on the correct steps to take if you have a safeguarding concern.

However right now, it's worth checking these contact details are correct as many staff are now working from home.

#### **In the event of an emergency, or if you believe a person is at immediate risk of harm, you must always dial 999 in the first instance.**

One of the most effective tools to help you notice the signs of abuse and neglect is dental safeguarding training. This is a legal requirement of every dental team in the United Kingdom, and the duty extends to dental admin staff, temporary staff, peripatetic staff, volunteers, work experience, and all clinical and non-clinical dental professionals.

Remember: Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

#### **Our team is here to help you arrange verifiable dental safeguarding training during the COVID-19 outbreak.**

We offer dental-specific online Level 1 and Level 2 safeguarding training courses at the Child Protection Company. These fully online

courses are recommended by the British Dental Association and are each worth three hours of verifiable CPD under the General Dental Council Lifelong Learning Scheme.

The Child Protection Company is a reliable choice for dental teams who have had to reschedule or cancel their face-to-face safeguarding training in light of the COVID-19 restrictions. Our fully online dental safeguarding courses are available instantly and can be accessed 24/7 from any device with an internet connection.

Learn at your own pace, with the ability to pause and restart exactly where you left off as many times as necessary, and download your dental safeguarding certificate immediately on successful completion.

We also offer face-to-face training but under strict COVID-19 guidelines to ensure everyone's safety, and these courses can also be delivered via Zoom.

#### **Can furloughed staff take online training at home without affecting their status?**

Government guidance states furloughed staff can also take online training at home without affecting their furloughed status, provided they volunteer to take the training and are not 'required' by the practice to complete it.

Our team is currently working from home, but we are still answering the phones as normal and working hard to ensure that everyone has access to verifiable safeguarding training at such a critical time.

For more information and to start training today, please visit our website at [www.childprotectioncompany.com](http://www.childprotectioncompany.com), or call our friendly customer support team on 01327 552030 between 9 am and 5.30 pm, Monday to Friday. Alternatively, you can send us an email at [help@childprotectioncompany.com](mailto:help@childprotectioncompany.com).

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Now, with schools closing for certain year groups on different days etc for the foreseeable future, this child might not have outside contact with anyone aware of what could be going on behind closed doors. Their teachers, almost certainly short staffed due to absences amongst colleagues to self-isolate, may no longer notice the tell-tale signs, and with most recreational activities on hold, the child's injuries and behavioural changes aren't likely to be picked up on by friends or relatives either.

For obvious reasons, this is a real danger. The sad truth is that many thousands of children are likely to be in this very position right now.

Yet, depending on the location, regular and emergency dental appointments continue