

Medical intervention in cases of Domestic Violence

What do I need to know?

Domestic Violence, whether psychological, physical or sexual, affects many people and can have serious health consequences, particularly within close relationships. Routine, sensitive questions about the cause of injury can encourage those affected to talk about violence, or allow them to remain silent if they wish, and this must be respected.

If explanations and your findings do not match, encouraging open communication without the presence of others can facilitate a willingness to talk.

In addition to medical care, victims may require protection and psychosocial support from specialised counselling centres, for example.

Some sample wording to get the conversation started:

- "Do you feel safe in your current home environment?"
- "Since Domestic Violence is unfortunately so common in our society, I ask all my patients about it."
- "If you wish, you can talk to me in confidence. I can inform you about further counselling and support services."

Counselling and help for professionals and those affected:

- Women who have been victims of violence will receive help and advice free of charge across Europe: EU-wide hotline: 116 016

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Medical documentation of findings in cases of Domestic Violence

- ▶ Document everything carefully in case it is needed for legal purposes.
- ▶ Always use a standardised documentation form and evidence collection kit.
- ▶ Obtain consent from the person concerned or their guardian prior to carrying out the investigation.

1. Basic documentation

Patient details: Name, date of birth, address

Details of the examination:

Where? Place of examination (practice/emergency room/clinic)

When? Date & time of the examination

Who? Name of the examiner

Other persons present?

2. Event/patient details

Create a calm and undisturbed environment for discussion and examination (be alone with the patient). Ask open, direct questions and respect any refusal to provide information. Take verbatim notes of the statements.

- **Where** (place) and **when** (date, time) has **what** occurred?
- **Perpetrator:** unknown/known? Number? Who?
- Body height and weight
- **Habitus; mental condition (describe, do not judge); special features (e.g., pregnancy, disability, illnesses).**

3. (Physical) Assessment

- **Where?** Exact location on the body, based on anatomical structures.
- **What?** Describing the findings (e.g., haematoma, cut)?
- **How?** Provide a detailed description of the size, shape, colour, depth and edge. Include a sketch, drawing or photos if possible.
- **How** the injury was done (e.g., object)?
- (Suspected) **diagnosis**
- **Age** of the injury(ies).
- **Evaluation of findings** in the context of the medical history: agreement with information provided (yes/no), and severity.

► **Special rules apply to documenting Sexual Violence.**

4. Further measures

- **Follow-up appointment** at the practice (date):
- Blood, urine or other samples (e.g., swabs for sexual assault): which tests are required?
- Further **diagnostic measures**?
- **Further referral** (e.g., to a specialist physician, counselling centre or legal support)?
- **What further steps were discussed** (e.g., drawing up a safety plan)?

5. Photo documentation

Photos support the medical documentation of injuries, as well as documentation of damage to clothing and medical aids. Written consent from the patient is required, and this can be withdrawn at any time.

- Photographs should be taken confidentially and discreetly, and only include the breasts and genitals if there are visible injuries.
- Code images anonymously and archive them securely.
- Take photos ranging from overview to detail without changing the camera position. For detailed shots: Position the scale (e.g., the scale on this card) in line with the findings and avoid mirroring.

6. Assessment of protection needs

- Inpatient admission (appropriate, possible or desired?)
- Is a place of refuge desired (women's shelter, men's shelter or relatives)?
- Are children involved?

► **If you suspect that a child's welfare is at risk, you must take further steps. The steps to be taken are country-specific!**