



Royal College of
Dental Surgeons of Ontario

Ensuring Continued Trust



SEXUAL ABUSE COMPLAINTS

What is sexual abuse?

The patient-dentist relationship is based on trust. Sexual abuse by a dentist violates that trust and is never acceptable. Sexual abuse is broadly described as a breach of professional boundaries between the dentist and the patient and a misuse of power in the dentist-patient relationship.

Some examples of this misuse of power include: inappropriate comments, gestures or behaviour. Such as: saying something sexually suggestive, giving unwanted attention like kissing, hugging or touching, asking you out on a date, making sexualized comments on your appearance or clothing, making sexually insulting or offensive comments or jokes, asking for touching and engaging in sexual intercourse. All of this is considered sexual abuse of a patient by a dentist.

What do you do if you think your dentist has violated patient-dentist boundaries or engaged in sexual misconduct or abuse?

If your dentist has touched you inappropriately, said something to make you feel uncomfortable or engaged in any form of physical sexual relations with you, please contact the College. As the regulator of dentists in the province, it is our responsibility to investigate your concerns. The mandate of the College is to act in the public interest. We are here to listen to your concerns and investigate all complaints.

What types of concerns does the College address?

The College investigates a wide range of concerns related to boundary issues, sexual misconduct and abuse that may involve:

- touching a patient in a sexual manner. For example, this could be giving a shoulder massage, which may or may not be sexual, but is always inappropriate. It could be placing a hand on a patient's thigh or touching a patient's breast.
- touching a patient for a non-dental purpose, such as conducting an exam below the neck.
- hugging or kissing a patient.
- making inappropriate gestures, such as imitating sex acts.
- placing tools on a patient's chest or neck area.
- commenting about a patient's physical appearance.
- asking personal questions unrelated to the practice of dentistry, such as asking patients about their personal intimate relationships.
- making unwanted contact by social media.
- sending sexualized jokes by email.
- making jokes of a sexual nature.
- having a sexual relationship with a patient.
- asking a patient to touch themselves or the dentist in a sexual way.
- displaying inappropriate materials in the office or on a computer, such as sexualized photographs or videos, or cartoons of a sexual nature.

The College also investigates concerns about sexual misconduct and boundary violations raised by staff members and others.

Who do I tell?

You can call the College to discuss your concerns and/or make a complaint. When you do, you'll talk to a staff person who will provide you with information about what happens during an investigation and will answer your questions.

In the first call, you don't have to give your name if you don't want to. You can go over what happened, and find out about the College's processes and what to expect.

If you decide to file a formal complaint, you are contacted by an investigator who is trained and experienced in working with patients who've been sexually abused. You'll have an opportunity to meet in person, regardless of where you live in the province. You are certainly welcome to bring someone along with you for support.

The College takes any complaints – about sexual abuse or anything else – seriously. As part of our role to protect the public, we investigate all complaints thoroughly.

If you don't want to file a formal complaint, there are other ways to share information with the College without getting involved in a formal process. You can talk to us about these options.

What happens when I file a complaint?

As with all complaints, your concerns are carefully investigated by the College. It will take a number of months for the investigation to be completed. The College investigator will likely interview you and any other witnesses, if any. The investigator will speak with you to explain step-by-step what will happen during an investigation and to answer all of your questions. Throughout the process, we'll keep you up-to-date on the status of the investigation. Once the investigation is complete, we'll send you a copy of the results of the

investigation. A panel of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee will then review the investigative materials and make a decision. In some cases, the Committee may decide to refer the matter for a hearing. In those cases, you may be required to appear. Again, your investigator will review all of this with you and the College has resources available to you so that you are supported through this process.

More details on how complaints are handled, what's involved and the possible decisions, is available at **How to File a Complaint** on our website.

Why should I tell the College?

The College has to rely on patients to tell us when things aren't right. That's what helps us protect the public. Most of the time, we learn about sexual abuse from people who make complaints.

Everyone has their own reasons for reporting concerns to the College. However, the most common reason given is not wanting others to have the same experience.

Incidents of sexual abuse often are not isolated and by telling the College what happened, you may also be helping others. Your information also allows us to investigate more effectively.

Reporting sexual abuse by your dentist can also help you too. It might bring you some sense of closure. You'll know the College is looking into the matter.

What kind of support is available to me?

The College understands that discussing details and answering questions about sexual abuse or boundary violations of a sexual nature can be very difficult. That is why we offer a special support program provided by a regulated health professional with expertise in sexual abuse matters. Your investigator will explain the details. More information about this service is also posted on our website at **Support for Individuals**.

In addition, once a matter involving sexual misconduct has been referred to the Discipline Committee, upon request, the College will provide funding for legal advice by a lawyer registered with the Law Society of Upper Canada who has expertise in dealing with individuals testifying about sexual abuse and boundary violations of a sexual nature and who may require independent legal advice. More information about this service is also posted on our website at **Legal Support for Individuals**.

You'll also find a list of organizations that provide support services or have information about local community services at **Community Resources for Victims of Sexual Abuse**.

Is there funding for therapy and counselling?

Yes. If you have been sexually abused by a dentist, there is funding available for therapy and counselling. Information about the funding and the application forms are posted on our website at **Funding for Therapy and Counselling for Sexual Abuse Victims**.

What about confidentiality?

If you decide to complain, you do have to give us your name. As part of the complaints process, it is necessary to send the dentist a copy of your complaint, which includes your name, for a response. You receive a copy of the dentist's response too.

If the process continues to a hearing before the Discipline Committee, while you may be required to testify at the hearing, your name will not be included on the notice of hearing posted on our website. In addition, the College seeks a publication ban to protect your identity at this public hearing stage of the process.

How do I contact the College?

If you think you have experienced sexual abuse by an Ontario dentist, please contact the College at **1-800-565-4591** or via email at **complaints@rcdso.org**. We are here to listen, to answer your questions and investigate your concerns. The College is committed to accommodating accessibility needs.



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