



To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing as a trauma psychotherapist to advocate and explain why the person who is giving this letter needs some extra care in order to attend a dentist appointment.

As a trauma specialist, I am aware that too many women avoid regular check-ups at the dentist due to the experience being far too triggering. I am sure you are aware that trauma is defined as any experience where the person was rendered powerless and terrified and then overwhelmed, This means that rarely can the survivor speak about the past ordeals, because words are too hard to access as the broca's area of the brain is usually 'offline' due to the need to focus on surviving the threat or perceived threat. This means that rarely can the survivor explain what is so terrifying for them about a routine check-up. This letter aims to help them explain.

What is triggering?

In the aftermath of sexual trauma, the experience of having a dentist ask for the person's the mouth to be open can already feel terrifying. This routine request sadly can cause shock when the patient immediately realises that the dentist's hand is in their mouth, which, although is an obvious part of dental treatment, causes an instinctive reaction from the subconscious which renders the patient powerless and terrified. The experience is not terrifying cognitively, and is expected and dreaded, because it is triggering due to previous similar experiences which were traumatic. The fast reaction of terror and powerless felt by this required medical 'invasion' would normally result in a fight, flight response, but due to the overwhelm of not being able to easily do either, a survival reaction could then be panic attacks, passing out, extreme dissociation and then once the appointment is over, a phobia of the dentist due to the inability to defend or escape.

What can help?

If the patient knows that you understand that they are anxious about the procedure, and you are able to be kind and gentle- this will already help them stay in the cognitive and not automatically react in a defensive, terrified way.

- Sometimes they may need to have music in their ears.
- Sometimes they may need someone to be there to accompany them.



- Sometimes they may need to hold something that has a strong smell to keep them grounded and feeling safe.
- Sometimes they may need to practice visualisation and so may not be able to hold a conversation or reply to any questions.
- Sometimes they may need to tell you about a method that helps them stay feeling safe.

It's important to ask if they want you to narrate what you are doing so they feel less powerless or if they would prefer to block out the experience with music or visualisation and they would rather indicate pain with hand signals instead.

I hope that helps you understand a little more.

We are grateful for your time spent reading this.

Please do email me if you would like more information. We appreciate your work in helping people stay healthy!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Betsy de Thierry', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Betsy de Thierry

Trauma Specialist, author of 7 best-selling books on trauma recovery and trauma psychotherapist.

www.betsytraininguk.co.uk