

Recognizing and Investigating Strangulation

Victim Interview

Use the victim's own words in asking questions and recording statements. If he or she says "choked me" or "cut off my air" or "grabbed my throat," use those descriptions rather than substituting the word strangulation.

- Have you been hurt? Who hurt you?
- How did it happen?
- Do you have any current pain or discomfort?
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most, how much pain or discomfort?
- Have you noticed any change in your voice or speech?
- Are you having difficulty speaking or breathing now?
- Did you feel faint or dizzy or as though you might pass out? Do you feel that way now?
- Did you lose consciousness? If so for how long?
- Did you lose control of your bladder or bowels? Did you vomit?
- Did the person who hurt you use one or both hands?
Use his/her arms, knees, or another body part on your throat or head area?
Block your nose or mouth?
- Were you pinned or banged against a wall? Thrown to the floor or ground? Shaken?
- Did your head strike anything? If so, do you have any additional injuries?
- Did he/she use other objects, e.g., cords, ropes, straight objects, against your neck/throat?
- Where exactly were his/her hands or the object that was used on your neck/throat?
- Can you demonstrate how you were [strangled]?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most pressure, how much pressure did he/she use?
- Did you have trouble breathing or catching your breath?
- How long do you think the [strangulation] lasted?
- How long did everything last, from the first argument or action until the police arrived?
- What did the person say before, during, and after [strangling] you?
- What did he/she do immediately prior to attacking you?
- What was her/his demeanor, facial expressions?
- What did you think was going to happen? Did you think you were going to die?
- Can you describe any attempts you made to protect yourself?
- Did you try to push, kick, bite, scratch, or pull his/her hair?
- Were you able to injure the person who did this? How and where?
- What caused him/her to stop the assault?

- Has this person [strangled] you before? How many times?
- Was this time more or less severe than the others? What was the most serious attack?
- Has this person attacked you or hurt you in any other ways before? How?
- Was the attacker/perpetrator wearing rings or a watch?
- Do you have any preexisting injuries? Any recent surgery? Are you pregnant?

Evidence Collection and Report Writing

1. Obtain specific, detailed descriptions and document:
 - How the victim was strangled
 - The mechanism for the assault (e.g. hands, cord, baseball bat)
 - Symptoms, and signs of strangulation
 - Visible injuries
2. Look for redness, scratch marks, scrapes, fingerprint marks, thumb-print bruising, ligature marks, bruising, tiny red spots, swelling and/or lumps on victim's neck.
3. Look for neck swelling; ask victim to look in the mirror to assess any swelling.
4. Check suspect for wounds inflicted by the victim trying to defend themselves:
 - Scratches to face or arms
 - Bruises on the shins from being kicked
 - Scratches to hands and elbow area
 - Bite marks to arms or chest
5. Try to locate and seize any weapons used.
6. Look for corroborating evidence in the room where the victim was strangled
7. Locate, photograph, and impound any object used to strangle the victim
8. Photograph and collect any damaged property
9. Obtain medical/dental release from victim
10. Photograph all injuries of both parties, no matter how minor
11. Take the following photographs:
 - Distance photo (full body) to identify victim and location of injury
 - Close-up photos of face and neck area at different angles
 - Follow-up photos of injuries 24, 48, and 72 hours later
12. Document the totality of the incident, in addition to the strangulation

REPORT

- In report writing, use the word "strangulation" not choke, except when recording the victim's exact words.
- Use the phrase, "consistent with strangulation."
- In narrative, report all signs and symptoms observed, consistent with strangulation.
- Record victim's description of injury even if there are no visible signs (include all complaints of pain; type and location).
- Record victim's exact words (e.g., "he choked me").