Definition of Dental Neglect

Latest Revision

2025

How to Cite: American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Definition of dental neglect. *The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry*. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2026:19.

Dental neglect is the willful failure of parent or health care guardian to seek or follow through with medically-necessary care that would ensure a level of oral heath essential for adequate function and freedom from pain and infection. A parent or health care guardian may become aware of the dependent's need for treatment either through recognition of signs and/or symptoms of acute disease or following evaluation and recommendations by a health care professional.

Dental caries, periodontal diseases, and other oral conditions, if left untreated, can lead to pain, infection, and loss of function. These undesirable outcomes can adversely affect learning, communication, nutrition, and other activities necessary for normal growth and development.

This definition was developed by the Child Abuse Subcommittee of the Clinical Affairs Committee, adopted in 1983, and last revised by the Council of Clinical Affairs in 1992.