

Presenting Case

3-year-old presents with weight loss and mouth pain. On examination, she is identified to have a fractured tooth and reports significant pain when the tooth is manipulated in any way. Parents report knowledge of the fractured tooth and pain for two months but deny seeking care previously.

This is concerning for medical neglect as not only do the parents report knowledge of this significant medical issue and deny seeking care previously, but also that she has likely had resultant weight loss due to decreased oral intake.

Additional information to gather

- Why did the parents not seek care sooner?
- Why are they seeking care now?
- Have they done anything to ameliorate the pain?
- Do they know how the tooth came to be injured?
- Has she seen a dentist previously?
- Has she seen any medical provider recently?

What to do next

- Children who present with a delay in care with significant dental issues that cause persistent pain and change in eating habits should raise red flags for possible medical neglect and/or dependency.
- A referral to CPS should be strongly considered as they can gather additional information from family, the child, the home environment, and other medical professionals the child may have seen previously to determine whether barriers to obtaining care exist or if there are other factors in the child's environment which may not be appropriate for their safety or well-being.