

Strangulation Information

Symptoms of Strangulation (*non-visible injuries?*)

- **Breathing changes**

- ✓ Inability to breathe
- ✓ Difficult to breathe
- ✓ Hyperventilation
- ✓ Shortness of breath

- **Voice changes**

- ✓ Hoarseness
- ✓ Loss of voice
- ✓ Raspiness (stridor)
 - Rule out asthma/allergies/pre-existing illnesses and document in your reports
- ✓ Nerve and/or larynx damage

- **Swallowing changes**

- ✓ Difficult to swallow
- ✓ Painful to swallow
- ✓ General “sore throat”

- **Vision changes**

- ✓ Blurred vision
- ✓ Darkening
- ✓ Tunneling
- ✓ Dizziness

- **Fainting or Unconsciousness**

- **Altered mental state**

- ✓ Short-term and long-term memory loss
- ✓ Light-headed or “head rush”
- ✓ May appear combative due to loss of oxygen in the brain

- **Shaking**

- ✓ Especially legs when maintaining balance

- **Short-term and long-term brain injury**

Visible Signs of Strangulation on victim (*Photograph when possible*)

- **Lung damage/vomiting**

- ✓ Aspiration risk if vomit was not discharged – get medical help immediately!

- **Abrasions/fingernail scratches on neck or chin**

- ✓ Determine if they are offensive or defensive injuries
- ✓ Fingernail marks more commonly result from the victims' own fingers, usually as they try to pry their abusers' body part or object from their own necks.

- **Bruises (ecchymoses) on neck or chin**

- ✓ These bruises are generally caused by the strangler's grasp/grip.
- ✓ Most likely to see such bruises at pressure points of fingertips
 - The area between the thumb and forefinger will not cause bruising because there are no pressure points
- ✓ May show outline of strangler's fingers, especially the thumb
 - Since the thumb causes more pressure than the other fingers, you will probably see more singular thumb impression bruises than bruises showing the complete hand grip/grasp.

- **Ligature marks**, depending on the object used

- ✓ Object used, necklace/other jewelry worn by victim, natural skin folds

- **Redness on the neck** (erythema)

- ✓ Although red marks may disappear quickly, still may demonstrate a detectable pattern.
- ✓ These marks may or may not darken to become a bruise. If bruising occurs, it may not appear for hours or even days.
 - Remember to follow up to determine color changes of bruising—this may be new evidence if nothing was visible at first visit.

- **Neck swelling**

- **Massive tongue swelling** (edema)

- ✓ Caution: may block victim's airway

- **Coughing up blood**

- **Miscarriage**

- ✓ *If this occurs, it will usually be after the incident*

- **Loss of bodily functions - Involuntary urination and defecation**

- ✓ ****Indicative of being closer to death****
- ✓ Ask about this while explaining to victims that this is a natural result of strangulation because they may be embarrassed or reluctant to volunteer such information.

- **Petechiae or petechial hemorrhage**

- ✓ Tiny red, brown, or purple “dots,” ranging in size from a pinpoint or a speck of dust to around 1/10th of an inch
- ✓ Occur as a result of blood capillaries that burst from the strangulation, causing bleeding under the skin.
- ✓ **Petechiae or petechial hemorrhage are often found:**
 - Under the eyelids and the white part of the eyeball when capillaries in the eyes are ruptured
 - On the neck above the area that was strangled
 - Gums
 - Lips
 - Around or behind the ears
- ✓ May be in a cluster resembling a rash
- ✓ They don't lose their color when you press on them

Note: The presence of petechiae helps to show whether a person committed suicide by hanging or was hanged by someone else to make a murder look like a suicide. If petechiae are found in a person hanging, it is a strong indicator that the person was still alive when hanged.

- ✓ None of this is absolute: The presence of petechiae does not prove strangulation, and the absence of petechiae does not disprove strangulation.

- **“Bloody red eyes” (or subconjunctival hemorrhage):**

- ✓ This occurs when the white part of the eye becomes bright red after a blood vessel breaks just under the clear surface of the eye.
- ✓ These will often look horrific, but are not believed to be painful
- ✓ They generally last for 10-14 days
- ✓ Note: Petechiae and bloody red eyes may also be the result of a strong sneeze or cough that causes the burst capillary, so be sure to ask whether such occurred and document the response on your report.

Strangulation – Descriptions & Statements

Victim's description of the experience

- "I thought he was going to kill me"
- "I thought I was going to die"
- "I couldn't breathe" "I passed out"
- "I vomited" "I lost control of my bowels"
- "I had trouble swallowing"
- "I saw stars" "I had a head rush"
- "I was dizzy" "Everything was fuzzy"
- "It was like looking through a tunnel"
- "Everything was black and white"
- "I thought that I was being hung by his hands"

Suspect's statements or declarations while strangling victim

- "I'm going to kill you!"
- "You're not leaving me!"
- "You know I can kill you!"
- "No judge, no cop, no DA can keep you safe"
- "I'm going to pop your neck."
- "I'm going to do an O.J. and leave no evidence"
- "What did I tell you last time?"
- "Why do you make me do this to you?"
- "I didn't mean to squeeze so tight."

Strangulation – Interview Questions

Determining the victim's physical and mental condition

- Is medical attention needed? (*Call EMS!*) Was medical attention sought?
- Do/did you have any difficulty breathing?
- Do/did you feel shortness of breath?
- Do/did you have a sore throat?
- Do/did you feel pain, discomfort, or have trouble swallowing? (*larynx injury*)
- Did you faint or lose consciousness?
- Do/did you feel lightheaded?
- Did you black out?
- Did you vomit, cough up blood, urinate, defecate, or lose any bodily functions?
- Do/did you have any “visible” injury? Where? (*Photograph, if possible*)
- About how long did the strangulation last? *How long did it feel like?*
- How did it stop? (*I broke away; Someone came by; Police shouted at the door*)
- Did you try to protect yourself? Describe. (*Photograph, if possible*)
- Ask victim to describe and demonstrate how she was strangled. (*Videotape or photograph the demonstration, if possible.*)
- How hard was the grip – how much pressure was applied?
- If injuries, did you show them to anyone?
- What did you think was going to happen?

Determining the suspect's actions during strangulation

- What did “he” use? (Hands? Forearms? Chokehold? Knee?)
- If hands, did he use one or two hands?
 - ✓ If one, was it the right hand or the left hand?
 - ✓ If one, what was he doing with his other hand?

- How much force did he use?
- Was he wearing any rings? (*look for marks; photograph, if possible*)
- Were any objects used? (*shows intent, weapons use*)
 - ✓ If yes, what was the object?
 - ✓ How did the weapon get there? (*intent*)
 - ✓ Photograph and impound the weapon; take it into evidence
- Did he shake you while strangling you? Describe.
- Did he throw or hold you against a wall? On the floor?
 - ✓ *Describe facts and surface; photograph, if possible*
- What was his facial expression?
 - ✓ “I saw hatred in his eyes!”
 - ✓ “He seemed possessed - he looked like the devil!”
- How was he acting? Describe his demeanor while he was doing it.
- What did he say?
 - ✓ What words was he using?
 - ✓ Was he shouting? Whispering?
- Do you know if anyone else saw or heard anything?

Determining history of other strangulations and prior abuse

- Has he ever strangled you before or threatened to do so?
 - ✓ *Describe each incident and method*
- Has he ever strangled the children or anyone else?
- Do you have any pre-existing conditions?
 - ✓ Recurrent injuries from previous strangulations?
 - ✓ Medical problems, e.g., asthma, allergies? (*Document*)