Non-lethal strangulation in domestic and family violence (DFV) is a significant indicator of a dangerous escalation in violence. It is also a risk factor for domestic homicide and has cumulative health impacts. Non-lethal strangulation may cause serious injuries to the structures in the neck that are not visible to the eye, and for which there may be delayed and/or generalised symptoms.

## Health Response

**ASK**

If you know/suspect a client has experienced domestic violence, ask them directly:

- Has your partner tried to strangle/choke/suffocate you?
- If so, how many times?

Evidence shows that in most cases of strangulation there are few or no external signs of injury.

**CHECK**

for signs and symptoms of strangulation, and key indicators for seriousness.

**SIGNS**
- Red eyes
- Petechiae in eyes
- Petechiae on skin on or above the neck
- Neck swelling or bruising
- Ligature marks on neck
- Droopy eyelid or face
- Tongue injury
- Lip injury
- Poor coordination
- Confusion

**SYMPTOMS**
- Neck pain
- Jaw pain
- Sore throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Vision changes
- Hearing changes
- Tinnitus
- Light headedness
- Headache
- Muscle weakness
- Voice changes
- Memory loss

**KEY INDICATORS FOR SERIOUSNESS:**
- Client reports:
  1. Loss of consciousness
  2. Loss of bowel &/or bladder control
  3. Difficulty breathing &/or developed a cough &/or changes to voice
  4. Thought she would die

**USE CLINICAL JUDGEMENT AND CONSULT**

to assess the need for further clinical tests/treatment

**INFORM & REFER**

Inform the client of the risks, symptoms, and possible health outcomes. Ask if the client would like to make a report to the police, and/or if she would like a referral to a specialist support worker.

- **HHS Social Worker PH:**
- **Specialist DFV Service PH:**

Please refer to the DFV Information Sharing Flowchart for Health Workers to guide your approach to sharing and requesting information.

**DOCUMENT**

client’s reported experiences of non-lethal strangulation, signs and symptoms, treatment, and referrals.

Strangulation in DFV is a standalone criminal offence in Queensland. You are not required to report the crime to the police, but health records may be subpoenaed.