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## Handling Orthodontic Emergencies:

As parents/ patients you will occasionally face an orthodontic emergency. Most orthodontic emergencies, are actually fairly simple to treat. In most cases, with the right tools and a little “tender loving care,” the patient will be able to feel better in a matter of minutes.

For some emergencies, you may need to contact the orthodontist . To help you accurately describe an emergency situation to the orthodontist, use the diagram below, which illustrates and names each part of a typical set of braces.



### **A. Ligature**

The archwire is held to each bracket with a ligature, which can be either a tiny elastic or a twisted wire.

### **B. Archwire**

The archwire is tied to all of the brackets and creates force to move teeth into proper alignment.

### **C. Brackets**

Brackets are connected to the bands, or directly bonded on the teeth, and hold the archwire in place.

### **D. Metal Band**

The band is the cemented ring of metal which wraps around the tooth.

### **E. Elastic Hooks & Rubber Bands**

Elastic hooks are used for the attachment of rubber bands, which help move teeth toward their final position.

## **Tools & Supplies:**

With these tools and supplies on hand in your clinic (most of which you already have), you will be prepared to handle the most common orthodontic emergencies.

- Orthodontic relief wax
- Dental floss
- Sterile tweezers
- Small, sharp clipper
- Q-tips
- Salt
- Interproximal brush
- Toothpicks
- Non-prescription pain reliever (acetaminophen or ibuprofen if not allergic to them)
- Topical Anesthetic (such as Orabase or Ora-Gel)

## **Emergency Treatments:**

The following orthodontic emergencies and their treatments are listed in the order of the least severe to the most severe. Only the most severe emergencies will require immediate attention by an orthodontist or medical doctor. The majority of these are easily treated in your home with a follow-up by the patient's orthodontist.

### **Food Caught Between Teeth:**

This is not an emergency, but can be a little uncomfortable or embarrassing for the braces-wearing patient. It is easily fixed with a piece of dental floss. Try tying a small knot in the middle of the floss to help remove the food. Or use an interproximal brush or toothpick to dislodge food caught between teeth and braces.

### **Lost Wire or Ligature:**

Tiny rubber bands or small, fine wires, known as ligatures, hold the wire to the bracket. If a rubber or wire ligature is lost, notify the orthodontist so that he may advise whether the patient should be seen.

### **Ligatures Come Off:**

If a rubber ligature should come off, you may be able to put it back in place using sterile tweezers. If a wire ligature comes loose, simply remove it with sterile tweezers. If the wire ligature is sticking out into the lip but is not loose, it may be bent back down with a Q-tip or pencil eraser to eliminate the irritation.

Of course, when one ligature pops off or breaks, others may follow. Be sure to examine all ligatures. Missing or broken ligatures should be brought to the attention of the orthodontist.

### **Discomfort:**

It's normal for a patient to have discomfort for a day or two after braces or retainers are adjusted. But it can make eating uncomfortable. Reassure the patient that the discomfort is both normal and temporary. Encourage soft foods. Have the patient rinse the mouth with warm salt water. If the patient is allowed to have over-the-counter pain relievers, acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be effective.

### **Mouth Sores:**

Some patients are susceptible to episodes of mouth sores. While braces do not cause them, they may be precipitated or exacerbated by an irritation from braces. One or several areas of ulceration of the cheeks, lips or tongue may appear. This is not an emergency, but may be very uncomfortable for the patient. Prompt relief may be achieved by applying a small amount of topical anesthetic (such as Orabase or Ora-Gel) directly to the ulcerated surface using a cotton swab. Instruct the patient to reapply as needed.

### **Irritation of Lips or Cheeks:**

Sometimes new braces can be irritating to the mouth, especially when the patient is eating. A small amount of non-medicinal relief wax makes an excellent buffer between metal and mouth. Simply pinch off a small piece and roll it into a ball the size of a small pea. Flatten the ball and place it completely over the area of the braces causing irritation. The patient may then eat lunch more comfortably. Let the patient know that if the wax is accidentally ingested it's not a problem. The wax is harmless.

### **Protruding Wire:**

Occasionally the end of a wire will work itself out of place and irritate the patient's mouth. Use a Q-tip or pencil eraser to push the wire so that it is flat against the tooth. If the wire cannot be moved into a comfortable position, cover it with relief wax. (See Irritation of Cheeks or Lips above for instructions on applying relief wax.) The patient's parents will need to make the orthodontist aware of the problem.

In a situation where the wire is extremely bothersome and the patient will not be able to see the orthodontist anytime soon, as a last resort, you may clip the wire.

Reduce the possibility of the patient swallowing the snapped piece of wire by using folded tissue or gauze around the area. Use a pair of sharp clippers and snip off the protruding wire. Relief wax may still be necessary to provide comfort to the irritated area.

### **Loose Brackets, Wires or Bands:**

If the braces have come loose in any way, the doctor needs to be notified, so that he can determine the appropriate next steps.

***PLEASE BRING ALL BROKEN/LOOSE PIECES TO YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT.***

### **A Bracket is Knocked Off:**

Brackets are the parts of braces attached to teeth with a special adhesive. They are generally positioned in the center of each tooth. The bracket can be knocked off if the patient has eaten one of those hard or crunchy foods orthodontic patients are instructed to avoid, or if the mouth is struck while at play. (We encourage patients, especially those with braces, to wear a protective mouth guard while playing sports.)

If the bracket is off center, the adhesive may have failed. Call the orthodontist, who will determine the course of action.

If the loose bracket has rotated on the wire and is sticking out, and the patient cannot immediately be taken to the orthodontist, you can do a temporary fix to alleviate discomfort and prevent further damage. But take care to prevent swallowing or other injury.

To put the bracket back in place, use sterile tweezers to slide the bracket along the wire until it is between

two teeth. Rotate the bracket back to the proper position, then slide it back to the center of the tooth.

**Piece of the Appliance is Swallowed or Aspirated:**

This is rare, but when it does happen, it can be fairly alarming. Encourage the patient to remain calm. If the patient is coughing excessively or having difficulty breathing, the piece could have been aspirated.

If you are able to see the piece, you may carefully attempt to remove it. But do not make the attempt if you would cause the patient harm.

If there is coughing or difficulty in breathing, call 911 (or the appropriate emergency number for your area) for advice or instructions, and notify the orthodontist.

If appropriate under the circumstances, examine the patient's braces for problems that may result from the missing piece, such as looseness or irritation, and treat as specified above.

If you are unable to see the piece and believe it may have been aspirated, call 911 (or the appropriate emergency number for your area), then notify the orthodontist immediately. The patient should be taken to an urgent care facility for an x-ray to determine the location of the piece. A physician will have to determine the best way to remove it.

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*After reading the above , if you are not sure what to do, you can call us at any time. The emergency number will be on the answering machine when you call the office.*

*We also request that you call the office during normal working hours , so that we can change your appointment to a longer one to repair the damage.*

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