

# Suicide Safer Home



## DO YOU HAVE A SUICIDE SAFER HOME?

Here are some practical tips to keep your family suicide safer. You can also download this information on Android and iPhones.

### The Suicide Safer Home - Why Is It Important?

You cannot remove all risk from your home, but you can make it suicide safer by talking with your loved one and by securing access to things that can kill.

Are you concerned that someone at home is at risk of suicide – a depressed teen, a 20-something going through a break-up, an adult with a financial or family crisis, or someone with a mental health or substance abuse problem?

Even if you think your family member is not at high risk for suicide right now why take chances? These simple steps can help you keep your family safer.

Among people who nearly died in a suicide attempt, 24% said less than 5 minutes had elapsed between deciding on suicide and making the attempt.

If easy access to lethal means is not readily available, someone may be able to get help during the heightened period of suicide risk and NOT die by suicide.

Suicide risk can sometimes escalate rapidly. Not having lethal means quickly at hand is like keeping the keys to the car away from a person who has been drinking. It reduces bad outcomes in high stress situations.

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### SUPPORT: TAKE ACTION NOW

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#### Take Action Now

When someone is at increased risk for suicide, they need increased support from family and friends. Many survivors of suicide attempts say that when they are feeling suicidal they see themselves as a burden to friend and family, so ongoing expressions of care and concern are vital.

#### Steps you can take to support your family and friends include:

- (1) Listen non-judgmentally
- (2) Be a caring presence
- (3) Inquire about their well-being
- (4) Ask the what type of support would be most helpful
- (5) Encourage involvement in activities the person enjoys
- (6) Ask the question, "Are you feeling so badly you are considering suicide," and seek more information and know how to refer them to help, if they say "yes".

- (7) Put the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 into your cell phone and your family member's phone.
- (8) Ask them if they have a safety plan in place.
- (9) If someone is actively suicidal, do not leave them alone
- (10) See assistance for them and for yourself. You cannot do this alone.

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for support and to find out about resources in your area. You can also urge the family member to call the hotline him or herself for support. It's accessible around the clock.

It's OK to call and check it out even if you or your family member do not need immediate services Sometimes that can help you feel more at ease if you need support in the future.

Inform yourself about suicide prevention in your area by going to the [www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org](http://www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org) website which features local, state and national information about suicide prevention and resources.

Install the ASK about Suicide to Save a Life app for mobile devices to help you with more information about warning signs, how to ask about suicide, and lists of local and regional crisis lines in Texas.

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## SUPPORT: MAINTAIN VIGILANCE

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### Ongoing Action

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center points out that thoughts of suicide may come and go, so efforts that support and maintain protection against suicide should be ongoing.

*Connectedness has long been associated with decreasing the risk of suicide.*

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## MEDICATIONS: KNOW THE STATS

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### Medications & Alcohol

Suicide attempts involving prescription medications and other drugs have jumped dramatically in the past few years according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and alcohol is involved in a high percentage of emergency room (ER) visits for medication-related suicide attempts.

In two reports, the agency examines trends in ER visits for medication-related suicide attempts.

The most significant increases occurred among adults younger than 30 – up 58 percent over the six years studied – and people between 45 and 64, who experienced a 104 percent spike in drug-related suicide attempts.

Medications are by far the most common method of nonfatal suicide attempts for all ages and both sexes. Teens who attempt suicide use medications more often than any other method. One in ten high school students in Texas report having attempted suicide, and the vast majority of these attempts are with pills.

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## MEDICATIONS: TAKE ACTION

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### Medications & Alcohol: Four Steps to Limit and Lock

- (1) Do not keep lethal doses of medications on hand. A Pharmacist can advise you on safe quantities. Be sure to discuss all medications – prescription and nonprescription, with your pharmacist.

- (2) Consider locking up ALL medications. Be particularly aware of keeping prescription painkillers (such as oxycodone and methadone) under lock and key both because of their lethality and their potential for abuse. But some over the counter drugs (such as Tylenol) can also be lethal in quantity. In a suicide safer home, all medications (prescription and over-the-counter) would be secured.

Medication lock boxes are available online and from many pharmacies. Some are simple lock boxes. Others are electronic devices that dispense daily doses of pills at programmed intervals while keeping the remaining pills locked.

- (3) Dispose of medications that are outdated or that you no longer need. Why keep medications you no longer need – especially if there is someone at risk for suicide in the home? Instructions for safe disposal of medications are available through the Poison Control Network at 1-800-222-1222.
- (4) Keep only small quantities of alcohol in the home. Alcohol can greatly increase the lethality of a drug overdose, and it can make a person more likely to make unwise choices such as a suicide attempt.

Remember: Call the Texas Poison Control Network with medication questions, or in a poisoning emergency at 1-800-222-1212.

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## MEDICATIONS: SAFER DISPOSAL

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### Medications: Safer Disposal

The FDA and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy guidelines for disposing of medications suggest:

- ▶ Follow any specific disposal instructions on the prescription drug labeling or patient information that accompanies the medicine. Do not flush medicines down the sink or toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.

Take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call you city or county government's household trash and recycling services and your local pharmacy to see if a take-back program is available in your community. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, working with state and local law enforcement agencies, periodically sponsors National Prescription Drug Take Back Days (Link to <http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov>)

- ▶ If no disposal instructions are given or the prescription drug labeling and no take-back program is available in your area, throw the drugs in the household trash following these steps.
  - (1) Remove them from their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter (this makes the drug less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through the trash seeking drugs).
  - (2) Place the mixture in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the drug from leaking or breaking out a garage bag.

DEA National Take-Back Initiative (Link to <http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov>)

[http://www.deadiversion.usdog.gov/drug\\_disposal/takeback/index.html](http://www.deadiversion.usdog.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/index.html)

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## FIREARMS: KNOW THE STATS

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### Firearms

In Texas there are twice as many firearm suicides as there are firearm homicides (2011 data) and more firearm suicides than firearm accidents. The majority of deaths by suicide in Texas for both men and women are by firearms.

Nationally and in Texas, firearms are the most common method used by people who die by suicide. Gun shots are more lethal than other means, they occur quickly, and the damage is usually irreversible.

85% of youth under 18 who died by firearm suicide used a family member's gun, usually a parent's.

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## FIREARMS: KNOW THE FACTS

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### Texas Law on Firearms and Minors

What should you know: It is against the law in Texas to allow a child under 17 unsupervised access to a loaded firearm.

Texas Law: Texas Penal Code 46:13 – Making a Firearm Accessible to a Child

It is unlawful to store, transport or abandon an unsecured firearm in a place where children are likely to be and can obtain access the firearm.

For more information on state statutes related to suicide, go to [www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org](http://www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org)

Texas Concealed Handgun License Laws and Selected Statutes

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/internet/forms/forms/chl-16.pdf>

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## FIREARMS: SAFER OUTSIDE HOME

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### Firearms: Secure, FOR NOW, Outside the Home

The safest way to reduce access to a firearm is to secure your guns for now outside the home.

One option is to ask a trusted friend or relative to hold on to your firearms temporarily. View a sample letter of agreement (\*see sample letter of agreement) between you and the friend or relative. It clarifies that the firearms are being held on a temporary basis only, lists the type/s of firearm and serial numbers, and clarifies the circumstances under which they will be returned,

If you do not have a trusted family member or friend that could do this, ask you local firearm dealer or gun range if they would store the guns. If they agree, you will be required to complete a background check to retrieve your gun, and the gun shop will have to log the guns into their books according to federal guidelines. They might charge you a fee for this service.

Another option (not free) is to pawn your guns for a small loan amount (e.g. \$100); when you retrieve the guns you will repay the loan and the interest dues (e.g., 15% per month).

Finally, some storage facilities allow unloaded guns to be stored.

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## FIREARMS: SAFER INSIDE HOME

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### Firearms: Keeping Safer at Home

If you cannot secure outside the home, lock unloaded firearms securely separately from ammunition.

Buying a gun lock or safe does not have to be expensive or complicated. You have many types of locks and safes from which to choose.

Your local gun shop or sporting goods store can help you choose the type of lock and/or gun safe that meets your level of security need, the safety needs of the person at risk, and your budget. You can also find articles on gun safes and different types safes for sale on the Internet.

If you usually have a loaded gun next to your bed, consider changing this habit while there is someone at risk in your home.

If you are not comfortable removing the gun for now or locking it in a gun safe, at least make sure that the loaded gun is secure by purchasing a small digital “book size” safe made for keeping loaded handguns safe.

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## FIREARMS: KNOW ABOUT SAFES

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### Firearms: Know About Safes

A firearm safe will give you and your family more security. Remember, for a suicide safer home, the keys to a safe should always be secured and NOT be kept on top of the safe or in any other obvious place.

A safe can range from \$35 to \$1,000+. The price will depend on the type of safe. Do you want a security safe installation? Do you want a safe big enough to store other things in? How much protection do you want your safe to have? How hard do you want to make it for someone to break into it?

The most affordable storage might be an inexpensive locking metal cabinet although it would not be as secure as a safe installed in the home or one made specifically to store firearms.

Safes made specifically to store guns come in all sizes and levels of safety from tampering, fire and theft. Check to see if a gun safe carries and Underwriters Laboratory Residential Security Container (ULRSCO) rating or better.

It is recommended that in suicide safer homes, firearms are stored unloaded and ammunition is stored separately from firearms. For those who either cannot or will not take this step and insist on having a loaded handgun close at hand, there are small digital lock boxes that can be programmed to be easily accessible to the owner but not to someone at risk.

Your digital code should not be one that would be easy for a young person in your home or a person at risk to guess.

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## FIREARMS: KNOW ABOUT LOCKS

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### Firearms: Know About Trigger Locks

There are essentially two types of trigger locks.

Trigger locks can come with keys or with a digital option. Be sure and keep your keys safe and not on the same key ring as your house or car keys.

The trigger locks that look like a bicycle lock are the simplest and cheapest ... but they are also the easiest to break. Because they are inexpensive, these are the types of locks that are often distributed free.

Nationally, and in Texas, there are several programs that provide gun locks for free like Project Child Safe. <http://www.projectchildsafe.org>

You can also contact Mental Health America of Texas (Internal link to Mental Health America of Texas contact information) to see if they know of other places to obtain free gun locks. Many sporting goods stores, law enforcement agencies and veterans groups also offer free or low cost locks.

A more expensive trigger lock fits into the trigger mechanism of a handgun or rifle. These work by keeping a person from being able to engage the trigger and fire the gun.

Get more information (Internal link to Seattle & King County, Public Health's 2014 Safe Storage Saves Lives Campaign) on firearms and locks.

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## ADDITIONAL STEPS: SAFETY PLANNING

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### Additional Steps: Secure Other Potential Means & Safety Planning

If your loved one has talked about (or attempted) suicide with something other than medication or guns, find ways to reduce access to those methods.

Of course, it's not always possible to reduce access to all methods. When individuals are acting suicidal, the safest option is to make sure that someone is always with them.

Seek a mental health provider's advice in this case, as it is too much to take on alone.

It is important to discuss any steps you need to take with your health or mental health provider. Additional steps may also be needed for suicide attempt survivor safety following release from the ER or hospital to secure the means that they used in their attempt or other means they may have discussed or seriously considered in the past.

Health and mental health professionals can help you and your family member make a safety plan. A safety plan is a list of coping strategies and social supports that people can use when they are in a suicidal crisis or are very distressed.

A safety plan helps people find alternatives to acting on their suicidal feelings. The plan is brief and in the individual's own words. Suicidal crises are often brief, lasting a matter of hours or sometimes days, usually not weeks or months.

It's hard when you're in the midst of one to realize that things are going to improve. A Safety Plan helps you recognize when you're slipping into a bad phases and gives you strategies to make it through alive. You can find Barbara Stanley's Safety Planning app in some app stores.

### To-Do List for Helping

- + Listen
- + Provide emotional support
- + Lock up medications after administering
- + Double-check that in-home firearms are secure
- + Talk with your loved one about tomorrow

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## RESOURCES

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### RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE AND HELP WORKS

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Do not leave someone at high risk alone. Seek help immediately.

\* In an emergency, dial 911

- (1) Take Immediate Action
- (2) Keep Safe / Do Not Leave Person Alone
- (3) Call 911 or seek immediate (*Link to <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhservices-search/>*) help from a health or mental health provider
- (4) Call your mobile crisis outreach team, or take to nearest hospital emergency room.
- (5) Take care of yourself too – this is difficult work

#### Poison Control Center

\* In an emergency, dial 911

#### Texas Poison Center Network

<http://www.poisoncontrol.org>

1-800-222-1222

#### Texas Resources on the Web

Mental Health America of Texas

<http://www.mhatexas.org>

Texas Suicide Prevention website jointly supported by the Texas Suicide Prevention Council, Mental Health America of Texas, and the Texas Youth Suicide Prevention Program

<http://www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org>

Texas Department of State Health Services

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhsa/>

#### National Resources on the Web

#### National and Other State Resources on the Web

American Association of Suicidology

<http://www.suicidology.org>

American Foundation of Suicide Prevention

<http://www.afsp.org>

Centers for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/index.html>

Harvard School of Public Health Means Matter Program  
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention  
<http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Rhode Island Department of Health Suicide Prevention  
<http://www.health.ri.gov/violence/about/suicide/>

Suicide Proof Your Home  
<http://www.suicideproof.org/>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center  
<http://www.sprc.org>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/>

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## SUCCESS STORIES

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### Stories of Success

In making homes Suicide Safer WE CAN Make a Difference

#### MOTHER'S STORY

Mother Gets Help Keeping Older Son Safe After Brother's Death

A mother, who was a recent survivor of suicide loss of her high school age son, lived in Central Texas with her husband an avid hunter, and her older, college-age son.

"I was in such shock after our younger son's death," she said, "that I wasn't even thinking about the fact that our older son was at risk after his brother's death."

"Since I am a nurse, I should have been aware of this. But I wasn't thinking. Thankfully, a friend came by with gunlocks. We kept all of our hunting rifles securely locked until we were comfortable that our older son was O.K. Now, although he's out of the home, we still keep the locks since we have grandkids, and we know it's illegal in Texas for kids to have unsupervised access."

#### HOMECOMING

A father secures lethal means before daughter's homecoming from inpatient treatment

Before his daughter came home from an in-patient mental health facility in Texas following a suicide attempt by medication, a father called the daughter's therapist for help in suicide "proofing" his home.

"I knew we needed to lock all firearms," he said. "But I didn't know about other potential items for self-harm or risk of suicide – especially since she had been engaged in non-suicidal self injury for some time. I couldn't figure out what we could do until I talked to others in suicide prevention. They suggested something really simple that I thought was doable."



"A friend held onto our guns, and then we locked all lethal medications and the sorts of things she'd been using to cut herself, like really sharp knives and razor blades, in our gun safe. Each time we had to use a sharp knife to cut up things in the kitchen, we got the knife out of the safe and then put it back."

"We did this until after our daughter's outpatient therapist said it was O.K. to stop. It was a hassle to do this, but we knew our daughter's safety was worth it."

### SURVIVOR: IN MY OWN WORDS

#### Suicide Attempt Survivor: Keeping Myself Safe

Since I grew up around guns and my father worked in a gun shop, I always followed gun safety, and firearms were locked in my home. But unfortunately the pills were not. When I was in high school, I attempted suicide by swallowing pills. I was found before I died, taken to the emergency room, treated, and went through months of treatment and therapy.

When I went to college, I decided I wanted to have a suicide safer environment since I knew college could be stressful for someone like me, who had attempted suicide in the past. I kept no lethal amounts of medications in my apartment, and I only kept really dull knives and collected all sharp knives and scissors and gave them to my grandmother for safekeeping.

### SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVOR

After her son's death by suicide, a mother in a small suburban Texas town kept feeling that she wanted to be with her dead son to "protect him." She knew that she would not act on this thought, and knew that it was an irrational thought, but it worried her.

After looking up articles on suicidal thinking and suicide prevention, she decided to act.

"I decided that I needed to follow the guidelines for safety, and so I made sure all firearms were locked and then took the keys to the psychologist we were seeing for postvention support. After six months or so, I asked the therapist for the key back since we were going to our family ranch."

"He said, 'No problem, you are not suicidal in my clinical opinion, I was just waiting for you to ask.'"

Since she now has grandkids, all family firearms are securely locked in a safe.

### SUICIDE PREVENTION GATEKEEPERS

#### Suicide Prevention Gatekeepers

"As suicide prevention gatekeepers, my husband and I are both comfortable asking about suicide. But until recently, we had never asked about securing access to lethal means. After attending a seminar and learning about the importance of reducing access to lethal means for those at risk of suicide until they are safe, we found ourselves in a situation where that was required."

"Over a glass of wine, a friend told us of his incredibly stressful week combined with high intensity family problems resulting in a brush with suicide. The previous week, he had seriously considered taking his life, put a gun in his mouth and thought of pulling the trigger...but he did not complete the attempt."

After listening non-judgmentally, we acted to refer our friend and his wife to help and asked if he would consider securing his firearms, for now, outside the home. Our friend agreed to counseling and willingly gave us the small gun we knew he carried in his pocket until the period of high stress was over."

“We followed up to help his wife secure his other guns outside the home and assisted them in making an appointment with a mental health professional. The heightened period of stress is past, he is still here, and we are still friends.”

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\*\*\*\*\* Sample Letter of Agreement, below, is referred to in the section “Firearms: Secure, FOR NOW, Outside the Home.”

## Sample Letter of Agreement

In order to keep me and/or my family safe, I am voluntarily asking you to hold onto my guns for the next \_\_\_\_\_ weeks. At the end of the period we will reassess how I/my family are feeling and make a decision about whether it is safe to return the guns to me. I expect that you will keep my firearms in good condition and safe from any unauthorized people. In accepting these firearms you are legally authorized to possess firearms at this time.

The gun/s I am giving to you to hold include (list the type, description, and serial number, including manufacturer, model and accessories such as scope, holster, case, etc.)

(1)

(2)

(3)

As this is a wholly voluntary act, we both understand that I can retrieve my gun/s at any time. However, since safety is the primary concern, I will strongly consider my or my family's feelings ability to stay safe before I request their return.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gun Owner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gun Holder

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\* This is not a legal document. Check with an attorney if a formal, legal document is needed.

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## DISCLAIMERS

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Note: This information is meant to share public health education and information only.

It is not meant to be used as legal, medical or mental health advice. Following the guidelines in the app should decrease the risk of suicide but we cannot eliminate ALL risk of suicide. Safe storage of firearms and medications should be part of a larger suicide prevention plan developed with your primary care or mental health provider, that may include treatment with talk therapy and/or medication and increased supervision. If someone you care about is at high risk, please follow the recommendations of your health or mental health provider and call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, if time permits, 1-800-273-TALK(8255,) or take that person to your nearest hospital emergency room.

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## ABOUT

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