

# Safety at Home: Keeping a loved one safe during a suicidal crisis

You received this handout because someone you care about is struggling with a mental health issue. Suicidal feelings sometimes develop in these circumstances. These feelings can come and go and sometimes escalate rapidly, especially during crises like break-ups, arguments, job loss, and arrests. Simple steps today can help protect your loved one should he or she become suicidal.



## Safeguard the home

Among methods of suicide attempt, the most lethal is firearms and the most common is medication overdose. Consider storing household guns away from home for now and limiting unlocked medications.

## Assess medications

- Properly dispose of any expired, unused, or unneeded medications.
- Lock up abuse-prone medications, especially opioids (prescription pain pills), benzodiazepines (anxiety pills), muscle relaxants, amphetamines (narcolepsy and ADHD pills), sedatives, and tranquilizers.
- Limit prescriptions the family needs on hand to safe quantities (such as a week or month supply, depending on the drug), and lock the rest. A pharmacist can advise.
- Don't lock rescue medicines like inhalers and epi-pens.

## Focus on firearms

### 1 Off-site storage (safest option for now)

The reasons we value guns — their speed and effectiveness — are the same reasons we don't want them used in a suicide attempt. Until your loved one recovers, some storage options are:

- **Friends or relatives.** Make sure they're allowed to possess firearms.
- **Gun shop or shooting range.** Some offer storage services. Depending on storage style, they may require a background check to retrieve the guns.
- **Pawn shop.** For a small loan, you can store guns at a pawn shop and pay monthly interest on the loan. To retrieve your guns, repay the loan and complete a background check.
- **Self-storage rental.** These units are a convenient, private way to store your unloaded guns.
- **Police departments.** Utah's Safe Harbor Law requires all police departments to store guns for free if a person asks. Police do not keep records once the gun is returned to the owner.

### 2 Secure in-home storage (not as safe, but second-best)

- Lock all guns in a safe; lock ammunition separately, or don't keep it at home for now.
- Locking guns only works if the person at risk can't get to the keys or combination; even if it's their gun.

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- Trigger locks, cable locks, and clamshell locks also add safety; however, these are usually not as secure as a high-quality safe.
- Another option is taking the guns apart and storing a critical piece like the slide or firing pin away from home (or locking it somewhere else).
- This applies to the self-defense gun, too. When a household member is struggling, many families decide that protecting against suicide takes priority until the person recovers.

### Enlist help

- If you're not the gun owner, ask for his or her help in storage decisions.
- Encourage the at-risk person to try professional behavioral health services. If they've already tried and it isn't working, try someone else. Recovery is possible.
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.273.8255 for other resources.

### Teens and children are a special concern

It can be harder to tell when an adolescent is in serious distress. Always lock up guns, and make sure your child can't get to the keys or combination; even if it's their own gun. Gun storage for kids under 18 is the parent's responsibility. If you are aware that your child is in distress, it's best to store guns away from home. Kids often figure out how to get to the guns even when their parents think they cannot.

### If you are the one at risk...

Follow these same steps. Consider storing your guns away from home or locking them and giving the keys to someone until you're feeling better. You can also keep the keys under your control but store them away from home, where you won't have quick access during a mental health crisis.

### Where can I learn more?

#### Check out these resources for help:

- National Suicide Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- Poison Control Center: 1.800.222.1222
- Use Only As Directed (medicine disposal resources): [Useonlyasdirected.org](http://Useonlyasdirected.org)
- Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition: [Utahsuicideprevention.org](http://Utahsuicideprevention.org)
- In an emergency, call 911 and ask for a CIT (crisis intervention team) officer.

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