When a Family Member is Suicidal
Firearm Storage Options

(Adapted from Maine’s Youth Suicide Prevention Program¹ and Harvard’s Means Matter Campaign²)

A firearm available to a person in the depths of despair can end a life in an instant! Firearms are used in five out of ten suicides in the U.S. Removing lethal means from a vulnerable person, be it an impulsive teenager or someone going through a difficult time, can save a life. It’s like keeping the car keys from a person who has had too much to drink.

Removing Firearms from the Home is the Safest Choice.

- **Temporarily store the firearms at the home of a trusted relative or friend.** Be sure the person at risk cannot get the firearms before or after it is removed. NOTE: Not all people can hold the guns for you. Check the list of prohibited persons³ under federal law.
- **Do not** place the firearms in a bank safe deposit box. Most states have laws that prohibit carrying a weapon into federally insured buildings such as banks.
- **Sell** the firearms following the appropriate legal guidelines.

Who Else Can Help Store or Dispose of Firearms?

- Some (not all) law enforcement departments will take firearms. Some offer temporary storage, some offer permanent disposal options, and some offer both.
  - **Call** your local police department, sheriff or state police.
  - **Identify** yourself and explain your concern.
  - **Ask** for the Officer on Duty; be sure to write down his/her name and the department’s name.
  - **Arrange** with the Officer a time and location for him/her to pick up the firearms, if they offer that service.
  - **Do not** bring the firearms to the police unless told to by the Officer on Duty.
- For other storage options, check with local gun shops, gun clubs, pawn shops or commercial storage facilities. There may be a charge for this service and you may be required to complete a background check to retrieve your firearms.

Do Firearms Need to Be Ready to Go in a Certain Way?

- If you know how to safely unload the firearms, unload them.
- If you do not know how to unload the firearms, tell the Officer before he/she arrives to pick it up.
- If the Officer asks you to bring the firearms to the police station, name who will bring them, what the person looks like, and the time the person will arrive.

What Happens to the Firearms?

- The gun owner and the Officer will complete some paperwork.
- What happens next depends on the department.
How Do I Get the Firearms Back?

- Departments that offer temporary storage may have different policies regarding how to retrieve them (e.g., you may be required to complete a background check or, if applicable in your state, you may need to bring in a valid firearm owner ID card).

What if even Temporary Removal is Not an Option?

- **Lock** the unloaded firearms in a gun safe or tamper-proof storage box with ammunition locked in a separate location. (BETTER YET, don't keep ammunition at home.) Be sure the keys and storage box combinations are kept away from the person at risk. Use trigger locks for added protection.

- **Remember:** This does not guarantee safety. *Youths generally know their parents’ hiding place and how to access them.*

What if a Family Member Carries a Firearm as Part of their Job?

- **Store** the gun at work if possible. If not, then…

- **Remove** all the firearms but the one required for work and lock it very securely. Lock ammunition separately.

- **Remember:** Using locking devices or locked storage does not guarantee safety, but does present a barrier to an impulsive act reducing the risk and increasing safety.

---

1 [http://www.maine.gov/suicide/about/lethal_remove.htm](http://www.maine.gov/suicide/about/lethal_remove.htm)
2 [www.meansmatter.org](http://www.meansmatter.org)
3 [Prohibited Persons](http://www.maine.gov/suicide/about/lethal_remove.htm)

Under federal law, [18 U.S.C. § 922(d)](http://www.maine.gov/suicide/about/lethal_remove.htm), no person may purchase or possess a firearm if they fall into the following categories, nor may any person knowingly sell, deliver, or otherwise transfer a firearm to any person falling into these categories:

- Is under indictment for or has been convicted in any court of a felony;
- Is a fugitive from justice;
- Is an unlawful user of a controlled substance (drug user);
- Has been adjudicated as a mental defective or committed to a mental institution;
- Is an illegal alien;
- Has been dishonorably discharged from the armed forces;
- Has renounced his or her citizenship;
- Is subject to a court order issued after a hearing which restrains him or her from intimate partner violence; or
- Has been convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence offense.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

*For more information: [www.nhfsc.org](http://www.nhfsc.org)*

*Last updated: 9/15/2014*