

# Conversations for Suicide Safer Homes

a CALM informed training



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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2

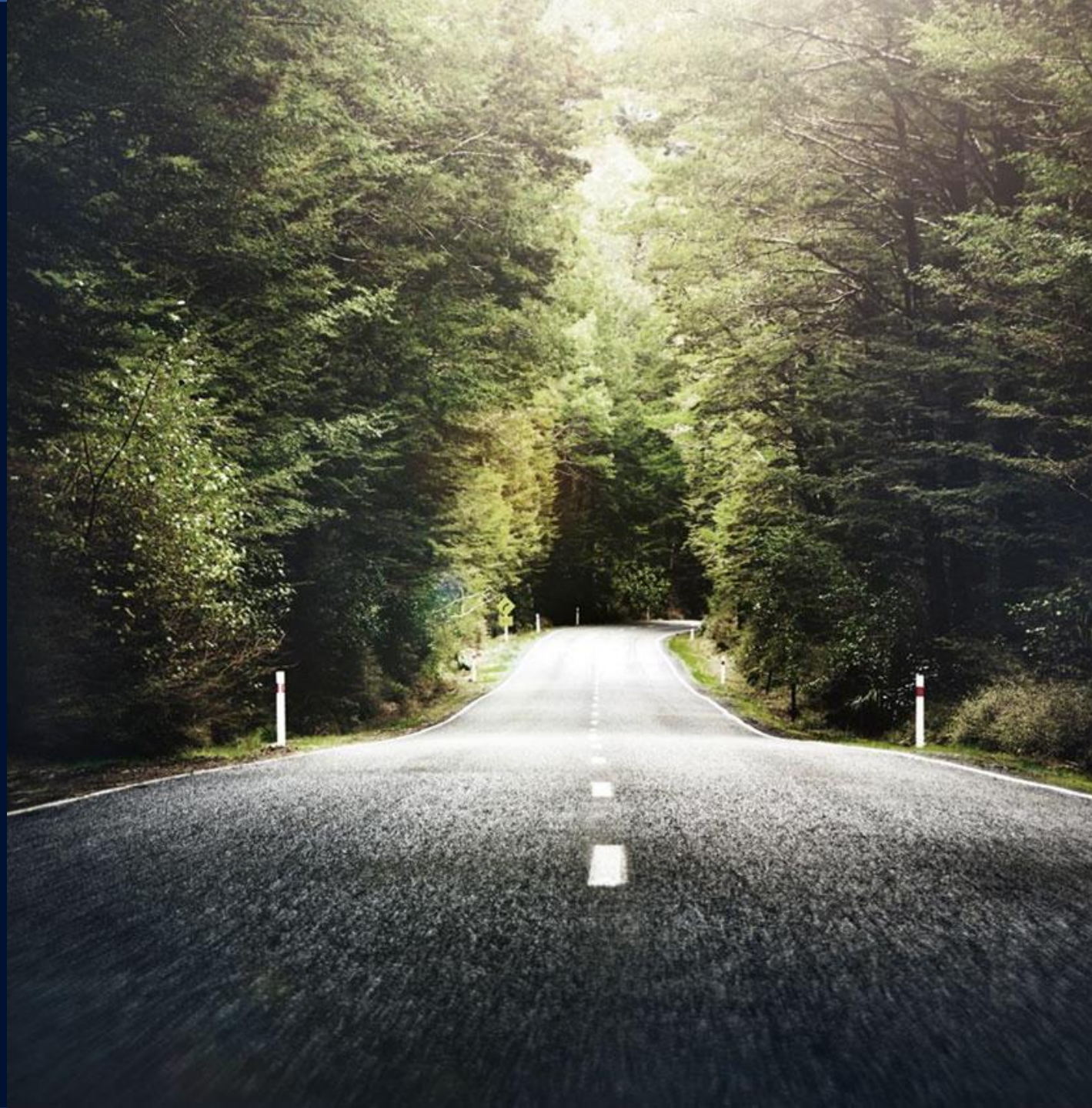
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## **With Special Thanks to**

Dartmouth Injury Prevention Center,  
Harvard Injury Control Research Center, and  
our partners and colleagues working in  
firearm suicide prevention



# ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP

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## **BASED ON COUNSELING ON ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS**

CALM is an evidence-based prevention resource by the Suicide Resource Center (SPRC)

Developed in 2006 in partnership with Dartmouth Injury Prevention Center

2

## **ONE PART OF SUICIDE PREVENTION**

Not **THE** answer but should always be included

Anyone can do it – not just clinicians/professionals

3

## **FOCUS ON CREATING SUICIDE SAFER ENVIRONMENTS**

Anti-suicide

Not anti-gun, not even anti-drugs.



# STANDARD HOME SAFETY PRACTICES

- Install safety gates & window guards
- Keep an eye on children around water
- Develop & practice a fire escape plan
- Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors
- Keep floor surfaces free of trip hazards
- Store medications safely
- Safe storage of household cleaners/toxic products
- Secure TVs, dressers, & appliances to the wall to prevent tipping hazard



# WHY SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT FIREARMS AND SUICIDE?

- **Suicide is a leading cause of death.**
- **Home is the primary setting where young people obtain firearms used in suicide.**
- **Talking about suicide is a research-informed best practice for preventing suicide.**
- **Gun owners have a role in preventing firearm suicide.**
- **Suicide is generally preventable**

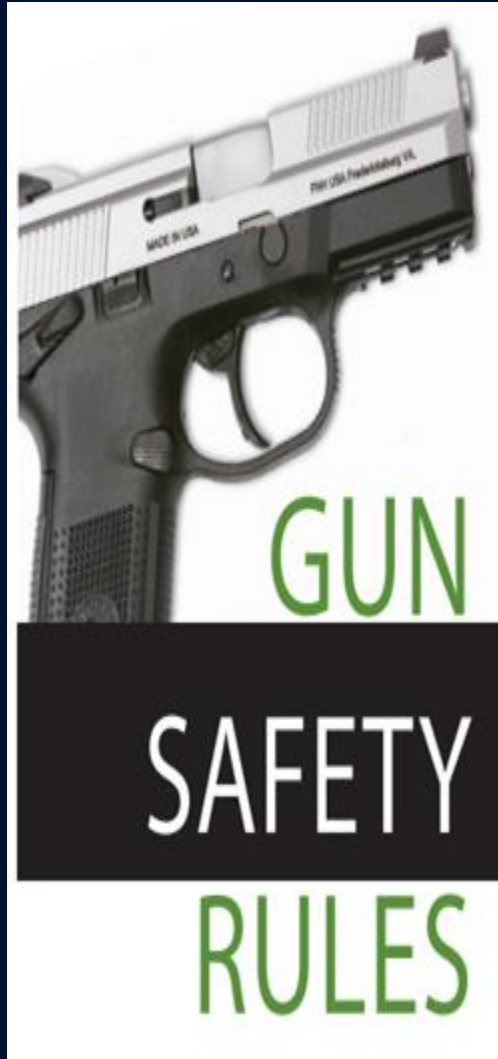




Warning – viewers will hear two gunshots at the beginning of the video



# COMMANDMENTS OF FIREARM SAFETY



1. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
2. Always point the muzzle in the safest direction.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot
4. Be sure of your target – and what's beyond.
5. Know how to safely operate and maintain your firearm before shooting.
6. Be sure that your firearm is safe to operate.
7. Be sure your firearm and ammunition are compatible.
8. Wear eye and ear protection when shooting.
9. Never use alcohol or other drugs when operating or cleaning firearms.
10. Safely store all guns to prevent theft and unauthorized access.
11. Consider temporary off-site storage or use safe storage strategies if someone in the home may be suicidal or is going through a rough time.





## Consider temporary off-site storage or safe storage strategies

for firearms and any other lethal methods if you or a family member may be going through a rough time or having suicidal thoughts and feelings





# RISKS FOR SUICIDE

## INDIVIDUAL RISKS:

- Mental health challenges such as depression
- Social isolation
- Criminal or legal problems
- Financial problems
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Job problems or loss
- Serious illness
- Substance use disorder

## RELATIONSHIP RISKS:

- Childhood abuse and neglect
- Bullying
- Family history of suicide
- Relationship problems – break-up, violence, or loss
- Sexual violence

## COMMUNITY & SOCIETAL RISK

- Barriers to health care
- Cultural and religious beliefs that suicide is noble
- Suicide cluster in the community
- Stigma associated with mental illness or help-seeking
- Easy access to lethal means among people at risk
- Unsafe media portrayals of suicide

# OBSERVE WARNING SIGNS — *a change from what is typical or expected*

- ✓ **Mood** — *depressed, angry, impulsive, lethargic*
- ✓ **Major life change** — *facing a breakup, legal/money challenges, or another personal setback that represents a loss*
- ✓ **Substance use or misuse** — *increase in prescription or recreational drugs or alcohol*
- ✓ **Behaviors** — *withdrawing from usual activities, writing or drawing about suicide/death, absenteeism or presenteeism, reckless behaviors, giving things away, acquiring or having access to lethal means*
- ✓ **Affect/Emotion** — *hopeless, sense of burden, trapped or stuck with no way out of the circumstances, unexplained euphoric shift like the weight has lifted off their shoulders*



# REDUCING ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS IS EFFECTIVE SUICIDE PREVENTION

1

Automobile Exhaust



2

Heights



3

Firearms



# REDUCING ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS IS EFFECTIVE SUICIDE PREVENTION

1

**Ambivalence:** *most suicidal people are **unsure of living or wanting to die**, they want to end their pain.*

2

**Transient/Temporary:** *suicidal thoughts often **come and go**; they are frequently momentary.*

3

**Urgency:** *to **end despair or pain** of suicidal thoughts is often reached very quickly – particularly among young people.*

4

**Lethality:** *methods vary greatly in **lethality**.*



# AMBIVALENCE



Photo Credit: John Green -- Bay Area News Group



# THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE CAN BE TRANSIENT/TEMPORARY

What percent of people who attempt suicide eventually die by suicide?

75%

45%

25%

10%



# URGENCY

*The time between suicide as an option and an attempt*

**Among survivors of near-fatal suicides when asked about the length of time between their decision to end their life and the attempt:**

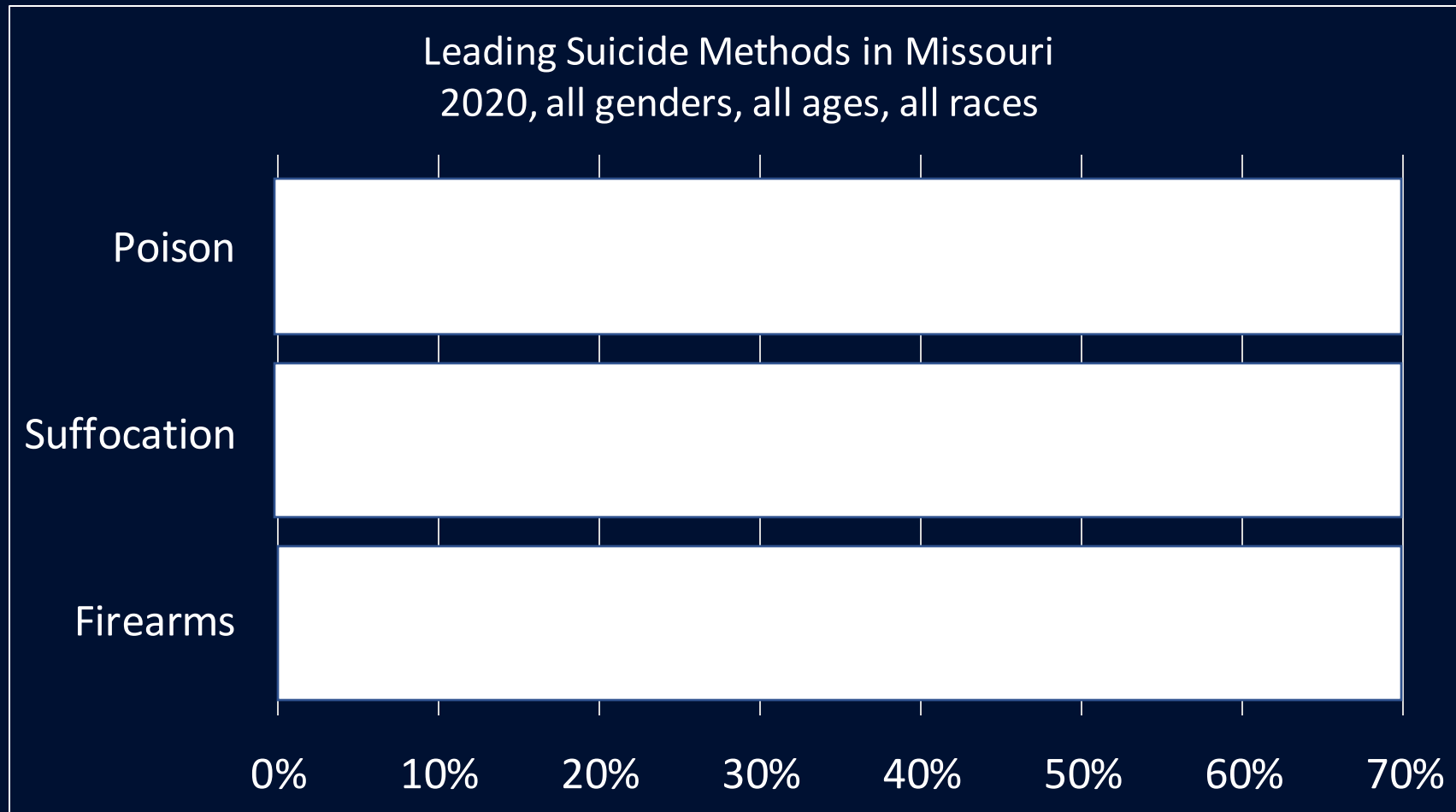
➔ **47% said an hour or less**

➔ **24% said less than 5 minutes**

**Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and lethal means MAY save a life**



# LEADING LETHAL METHODS OF SUICIDE IN MISSOURI



CDC WISQARS, 2021





# LETHALITY

90% fatal



Firearms

1-2% fatal



Sharps & Overdose



# WHY FOCUS ON FIREARMS?

**Frequency:** *+60% of suicides in Missouri are with a firearm*

**Lethality:** *almost always fatal*

**Impulsivity:** *<10 minutes between thoughts and action*

**Availability:** *46% of Missourians have access to a firearm in the home*

**Cultural Acceptability:** *'shall issue/open carry' state*



# ACCESS TO FIREARMS INCREASES SUICIDE RISK

- *Suicide rates vary with rates of firearm ownership.*
- *82% of youth who die by suicide used a firearm owned by a family member, usually a parent.*
- *Parents underestimate the likelihood that their children have or could obtain their firearms.*
- *Two out of three firearm-related deaths in the U.S. are a suicide.*



# MAYBE IT'S NOT THE GUNS

Are people who live in homes with guns more likely to have...		
... a mental health problem?	Yes	No
... seriously consider suicide?	Yes	No
... attempt suicide?	Yes	No

Gun owners aren't likely to be more suicidal, just **more likely to die** if they make an attempt.





*Encourage putting time and distance  
between a person in emotional crisis  
and access*

***ALL/ANY lethal means**  
to POTENTIALLY save a life*

# WHY HAVE THE CONVERSATION?



## You recognize the warning signs or have a gut feeling

- ✓ **Mood** – *depressed, angry, impulsive, lethargic*
- ✓ **Major life change** – *facing a breakup, legal/money challenges, or another personal setback that represents a loss*
- ✓ **Substance use or misuse** – *increase in prescription or recreational drugs or alcohol*
- ✓ **Behaviors** – *withdrawing from usual activities, writing or drawing about suicide/death, absenteeism or presenteeism, reckless behaviors, giving things away, acquiring or having access to lethal means*
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Courtesy of Worried About A Veteran



# WHEN & WHERE TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION?



**ASAP – life vs death**



**Stress concern for safety**



**Where it's convenient, familiar, private, and safe**





# START THE CONVERSATION – *ask about suicide*



## **Express care and concern for their well-being**

*“Because of X, Y, Z, I am worried about you.”*

*“I have noticed lately you’ve been X, Y, and Z. Are you okay?”*



## **Ask directly about suicide**

*“Are you thinking about suicide?”*

*“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*

*“It’s not uncommon for people to think about suicide when they are going through a hard time like you are. I’m wondering if you have thought about ending your life.”*



# PRACTICE ASKING THE QUESTION – *ask about suicide*



*“Are you thinking about suicide?”*

*“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*

**“NO”**



# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION – *when the answer is “No”*



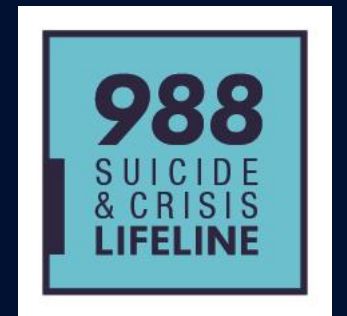
## Reinforce your care and concern

*“I’m glad to hear that you’re not thinking about suicide, now.”*

*“I want you to know that I care about you.”*

*“I want you to know I am here for you if you ever do start to think about suicide.”*

*“If that should ever change, free and confidential help is available.”*

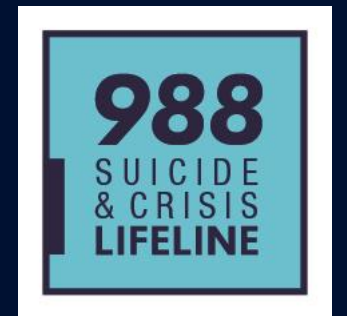


# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION – *when the answer is “No”*



## When you know there is access to lethal means in the home

*“When someone is going through a rough time, like you are, thoughts of suicide are not uncommon. I know you have firearms in the home. I care about you. Can we work together to make sure your firearms are stored safely and responsibly, or even temporarily remove them from the home until things get better?”*





Courtesy of Worried About A Veteran



# START THE CONVERSATION – *ask about suicide*



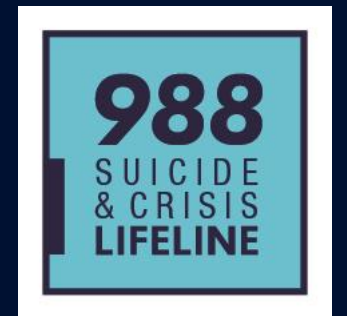
## Practice asking the question

*“Are you thinking about suicide?”*

*“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*

# “YES”

You are not alone in this conversation. Call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline if you need help continuing the conversation.



# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION – *when the answer is “Yes”*

Thank them for being honest, and express concern for their safety



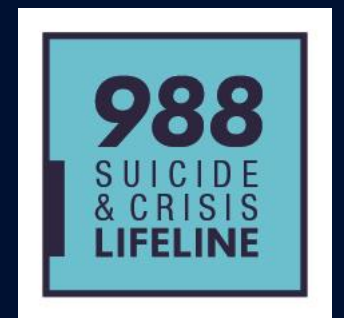
*“Thank you for trusting me with that. How can I help you?”*

*“You must be feeling really stuck, without options.”*

*“I’m really worried about you. How long have you been feeling this way?”*

*“I’m glad you shared it with me. You’re not alone. I want to help keep you safe.”*

You are not alone in this conversation. Call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline if you need help continuing the conversation.



# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION – *when the answer is “Yes”*



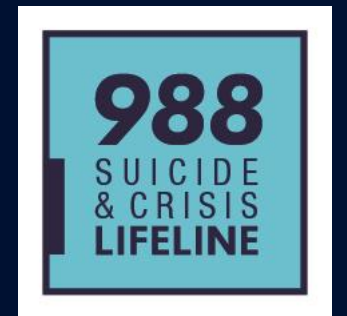
## Explore access to lethal means

*“Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?”*

*“Do you have access to the (insert method) you would use to end your life?” – helps determine the immediacy of risk*

*“How quickly could you have access to (insert method) you would use to end your life?” – establishes a potential timeline*

**You are not alone in this conversation. Call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline if you need help continuing the conversation.**





# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION – *follow up steps*



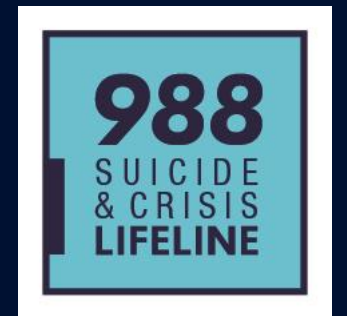
## Shift thinking toward safety

- ✓ *“What changes could we make to reduce access to lethal methods?”*
- ✓ *“Would you consider removing ammunition from the home?”*
- ✓ *“Can we utilize in-home or out-of-home safe storage options, or render the lethal method inoperable?”*



## Reinforce that time & distance can **REDUCE** the risk of death

- ✓ *“What can we do to put some distance between you and the (insert method)?”*



# WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE



## **Work together to create a plan to keep them as safe as possible**

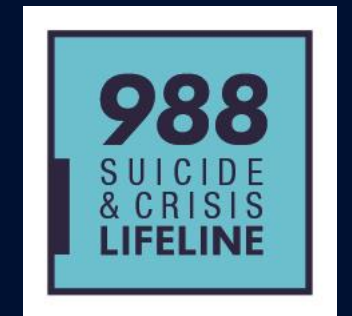
- ✓ *Who else can be included in the plan to keep them safer?*
- ✓ *The goal is to keep them safer until they get to help, or help is brought to them.*



## **Don't leave them alone until you trust they can be safe**

- ✓ *Provide them with resources to access help for themselves in the event they need help in the future*

*Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and highly lethal means MAY save a life*



# KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING



## Identify people who could help

*“Who do you trust to hold on to your firearms while you/your loved one is at risk and unsafe?”*



## Explore concerns about temporary removal of lethal means

*“What are the roadblocks to temporarily removing or increasing the safe storage of firearms in your home ?”*



## Explore safe storage strategies to store firearms safely in the home

*“What are some things that would increase firearm safety in the home?  
“What would you feel comfortable doing to increase the safe storage of your firearms?”*



## Make a specific plan and follow up

*“We agree that in order to keep you/your loved one safe we need to...”*



Courtesy of Worried About A Veteran



# ON-SITE STORAGE OF FIREARMS



**Lock all guns unloaded in a gun safe or lock box**

✓ *Remove ammunition from the home or lock it in a separate location*



**Change the combination or key location in the event the person at risk for suicide knows them**



**Layer safety with a trigger, cable, or clamshell lock**



**Remove a key component of the firearm like the firing pin**



# ON-SITE STORAGE OF FIREARMS



## Consider distraction techniques

- ✓ *Adhere a Suicide & Crisis Lifeline magnet to the gun safe*
- ✓ *Leave photos of loved ones or reasons for living in the safe*
- ✓ *Freeze keys to the safe in ice*
- ✓ *Surrender safe keys to a trusted friend*
- ✓ *Store keys in a safety deposit box at the local bank*





Courtesy of Worried About A Veteran



# PERSONAL PROTECTION FIREARMS



**In the immediate future, suicide is a greater risk than home invasion**

- ✓ *2 out of 3 firearm deaths in the U.S. are suicide.*



**Consider other means of self-defense**

- ✓ *Baseball bat, mace or pepper spray, or a home security system*



**If self-defense is essential, urge someone else, not the person at risk keeps the firearm either**

- ✓ *In a quick-access or biometric gun safe*
- ✓ *Holstered and on their person at all times*
- ✓ *Stored in a gun safe when not physically in their control*





# SHIFT TOWARDS SAFETY



**An unloaded and locked firearm poses a lower risk for suicide**

- ✓ *Store ammunition separately or outside the home*



**Hiding guns is usually not effective**

- ✓ *Family members usually know our hiding places*

**Those familiar with firearms may be at higher risk for firearm suicide**



- ✓ *Hunter safety education is not a protective factor for firearm suicide*



# SHIFT TOWARD SAFETY

OFF-SITE STORAGE

- **Friend or relative**
- **Gun range**
- **Self-storage facility**
- **Pawn shops**



IN-HOME STORAGE

- **Store firearms locked, and unloaded in a safe or lockbox**
- **Trigger, clam, or cable locks**
- **Secure locking device (keys or combination) with a trusted person**



OTHER OPTIONS

- **Render the device inoperable by removing the firing pin**



# REDUCE ACCESS TO OTHER LETHAL METHODS



## Dispose of out-of-date, unused, or excess medications and over the counter remedies

- ✓ *Do not flush or pour down the sink*
- ✓ *Purchase drug deactivation kits at local pharmacies or local public health departments*
- ✓ *Law enforcement medication drop boxes*



## Store large quantities and unused medications in a pill safe or lock box



# REDUCE ACCESS TO OTHER LETHAL METHODS



## Reduce quantities of prescription and OTC medications

- ✓ *Especially medications used to control pain (opioids) or other misused medications*



## The person at risk should not control lethal quantities of medication

- ✓ *Talk to the pharmacist about dispensing safer quantities, switch to blister packs, or dispense in pill organizers*



# REDUCE ACCESS TO OTHER LETHAL METHODS



## Consider implements for suffocation or hanging

- ✓ *Almost impossible to remove all means, but consider shoelaces, blinds cord, trashcan liners, belts, and ropes*
- ✓ *Maintain physical and emotional contact – “eyes on”*
- ✓ *Keep bedroom door open to maintain eyes and ears on them*



## Other methods (e.g., sharps, heights, drowning)

- ✓ *Reduce access whenever possible – remove, limit, disable*
- ✓ *Maintain physical and emotional contact – “eyes on”*
- ✓ *Focus on other ways of increasing safety*

Reducing access to lethal means is only one part of preventing suicide. Always seek help from a professional when someone is at risk for suicide.



# REMEMBER



## Begin with concern and empathy

- ✓ *“I care about you and want you to be safe.”*



## Ask directly about suicide

- ✓ *“Are you thinking about suicide?”*
- ✓ *“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*



## Focus on increasing safety

- ✓ *Discuss the temporary nature of both suicidality and limited access to lethal means.*
- ✓ *Familiarity with medications or firearms may increase rather than decrease risk*



## Involve others in preventing suicide

- ✓ *Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling 988*





*FREE*  
*Confidential*  
*24/7/365*



*SaferHomesCollaborative.org*



# THANK YOU

[Instructor Name:]

[Instructor Email:]

[Instructor Phone (optional):]

