

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

MENTAL HEALTH, SUICIDE PREVENTION AND FIREARM STORAGE

Teens today face more challenges and pressures in their lives, and are dealing with more anxiety, loneliness, depression and stress than generations before them. Teens' mental health and even suicide are concerns for parents. The good news is that suicide can be prevented. By educating yourself, you can learn what you can do to help protect at-risk youth.

What's the best way to start a conversation with my teen about whether they are having suicidal thoughts?

The best way to start a conversation with your teen about mental health is to be direct. You should specifically ask your teen if they've had suicidal thoughts. It's important to hold all discussions in a nonjudgmental, empathetic manner and follow up regularly to express your care and concern.

What makes a teen at higher risk of suicide?

We think about risk factors in three buckets: health, environmental and historical factors. Here are some examples of each:

- Health: Physical and mental health (depression, bipolar and anxiety disorders), substance abuse, serious health conditions.
- Environmental: Stressful life events such as family turmoil, death, divorce, family transitions, financial troubles and peer rejection.
- Historical: Previous self-harm attempts, history of childhood abuse/neglect/trauma, exposure to another family member or friend's suicide.

What do you recommend I do if my son or daughter doesn't want to talk or open up?

Even if the first conversation doesn't go well, continue to check in on them. It's important to let them know you care about them and that their mental health is just as important as their physical health. Let them know you're there for them whenever they're ready to talk.

Will talking about suicide make it more likely that they will hurt themselves or attempt suicide? ---

It's a myth that having conversations about suicide and mental health will increase a person's risk of suicide. Actually, the opposite is true. Showing teens you care about them and their mental well-being can help lower risk of suicides.

What lethal means do I need to be aware of and secure? ---

Parents should be aware of firearms, prescription medicines, alcohol, chemicals and other items that could be used to inflict self-harm, such as knives. If you are worried your child is going through mental health challenges, it's best to keep these items secured under lock and key.

FIREARM SAFETY & SAFE GUN STORAGE

What is the best way to make sure my gun is safely secured from someone at risk of suicide? ---

Gun owners can choose from multiple options to safely store and protect firearms from unauthorized people, especially those at risk of suicide. A low-cost option is a cable lock, which Project ChildSafe provides to communities across the country for free. The cable lock runs through the barrel or action of the gun to prevent it from being fired, and requires a key to unlock it. There are other safe storage options available, including gun cases, lock boxes and full-sized safes. A cable lock is best used in combination with one of these other devices. Other safe storage options include a gun case, lock box or a full-size safe, which can only be opened with a key, code, combination or biometric fingerprint. It's crucial that you only share access with authorized persons, and those you don't consider to be at risk of suicide.

Should I remove my guns from the home if I think my teen is showing mental health warning signs? ---

If you think your teen is at risk of suicide, consider storing firearms temporarily outside the home so they're not accessible to the person at risk. Check your state firearm transfer laws.

Any other advice on safe storage practices to reduce risk of suicide? ---

Firearms should be stored locked and unloaded when not in use, and when possible, store ammunition separately. Stored firearms can be disassembled, such as by removing the firing pin to prevent operation, though this requires knowledge of correct assembly and disassembly. If using a key lock, keep the keys on your person or inaccessible to the person at risk.

To access the full Parents Resource, Tip Sheet for Parents, Peer-to-Peer resource for teens, or to watch the full replay of the webinar for which these FAQs were developed, scan the QR code or visit WWW.PROJECTCHILDSAFE.ORG/PARENTS-RESOURCES.

This resource was developed in partnership with Dr. Doreen Marshall, Vice President for Mission Engagement at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and Dr. Sherry Molock, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at George Washington University.

