



## Safer Homes Collaborative

Retailers Preventing Suicide:  
Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Won't a suicidal person just use something else if they can't get a gun?**  
Sometimes, yes. But almost every other method is less lethal than a firearm so there's a greater chance the person won't die in their attempt. Also, other methods allow time for rescue or give the ambivalent attempter some time to change their mind mid-attempt.
- 2. If a suicidal person substitutes another method and doesn't die, won't they eventually figure out a way to kill themselves later?**  
Suicidal feelings often pass over time. Studies that follow people over many years have found that roughly 90% of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide, including those who made a very serious attempt, like jumping in front of a train.
- 3. Suicide is a sensitive subject – I'm concerned about offending my customers or making them feel uncomfortable.**  
It's true this is a difficult subject, but it's also true that thoughtful conversations about hard topics can produce good outcomes, in this case even save lives. A customer might see a poster or brochure in your store, for example, and talk to his newly-divorced brother about letting him hold onto his guns until his deep depression lifts. Your store may have just helped save a life without your even knowing it. That said, it is very important to ensure materials share information in a respectful manner.
- 4. Suicide is a personal choice – it's your right to end your life. Who am I to intervene if someone doesn't want to live anymore?**  
Suicide is certainly a personal choice. Some people attempt suicide after a lot of deliberation and are virtually certain life is no longer worth living. But many attempt during a crisis and most are ambivalent. Over half of attempters report less than an hour passed between deciding on suicide and making the attempt, according to a number of studies. Often people who survived serious attempts say something like: "The moment I jumped I said to myself, 'What did I just do? I don't want to die...'" Also, thousands of people in their teens and twenties kill themselves each year in the U.S. – too young an age to give up on life.
- 5. Does relocating the guns for a while always work?**  
Temporarily reducing access to firearms and other lethal means is only part of the broader suicide prevention plan. Those considered actively suicidal are best protected by not being left alone until they are feeling better. Getting professional help and the support of other family and friends is strongly advised. Help is available 24/7. If you or someone you know is in emotional crisis **call** the National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or **text** the Crisis Line 741-741.
- 6. I'm concerned I'll be sued if I refuse to make a sale or rent a firearm to someone who passes the background check.**  
Stores and ranges are NOT violating 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights by refusing a purchase or rental if they suspect something isn't right. It is well within their legal rights to deny a transaction (as long as the denial is not simply based on a person's race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or sex). In fact, there have been instances where store owners have been sued by the family members of someone who purchased a firearm and killed themselves soon after.

**7. Customers could be acting funny for other reasons besides suicide – first time customers in particular are often a little nervous and don't know anything about guns.**

It's hard to know for sure if someone is suicidal. The Tip Sheet is meant to help your staff identify customers who exhibit some "red flags." Usually new customers are eager to hear purchasing advice from staff, and will gladly respond to questions asked when helping them select the best firearm for their purposes. It's those who are reluctant to converse with staff about the purchase, or who seem to be troubled, who require extra caution. You should "go with your gut" and your experience.

**8. I have had a customer purchase a gun for suicide, and he didn't exhibit ANY warning signs at all. You can't always spot people who are really serious about killing themselves.**

There have been occasions when a dealer asked a person who seemed shaky whether they should really be buying this gun and they admitted they were considering suicide. The more ambivalent someone is about suicide, the greater opportunity for intervention.

**9. What do I say to a customer who keeps a gun at home for self-defense but is worried about someone at home who's going through a rough time?**

It depends on how that gun is stored. If a customer's loved one at home (or with keys to their home) is going through a rough time, they may want to re-evaluate the accessibility of firearms to that person. Suicide may be the bigger threat that your customer has to guard against in the short term until the situation improves.

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**For additional information or materials contact:**

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