

# Options for Temporarily Reducing Access to Firearms While Someone is at Risk for Suicide

**Storing firearms away from home is the most effective strategy for putting time and distance between a suicidal person and a firearm.**

*Check state and local laws as well as other local resources to be sure that your recommendations follow applicable laws and you are providing current resources.*

(B – indicates that a Background Check may be required as part of this process; \$ - indicates that there may be a cost)

**B Storing with friends or family** – Since this does not involve any formal procedures, this is often the best option. Further, it provides an opportunity to gain the support of friends and family who may be helpful during this difficult time.

To be eligible to hold on to your firearms, the person should not be prohibited from possessing firearms. Under federal law, a person is prohibited if he/she:

- Is under indictment for, or has been convicted of, a felony;
- Is a fugitive from justice;
- Is an unlawful user of a controlled substance (drug user);
- Has been adjudicated mentally incompetent or been involuntarily committed to a mental institution;
- Is in the country unlawfully;
- 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.

Check state laws – in some, the individual must possess either a handgun or a concealed carry permit in order to legally possess any firearms including those belonging to others. These rarely apply to long guns.

**In some states, any transfer of firearms from one individual to another requires a background check.**

**\$ Self-Storage Facilities** – Many self-storage facilities welcome storage of firearms. In some states, however, storing firearms is illegal in self-storage facilities. Those that offer storage drawers are the least expensive option for someone who only needs to store a few handguns. These go for about \$20/month. Many facilities don't offer drawers, and the smallest unit size is often a 5 foot by 5 foot unit. These go for \$30-\$75/month depending on location and whether they're climate-controlled. An initial administrative fee is usually required as well. Most facilities require that all guns be unloaded. Some allow storage of ammunition, others don't. Some facilities that don't allow storage of firearms assume that there may in fact be firearms in their units since they don't see what people put in their units.

At 24 hour facilities you can retrieve your property at any time as long as you've been paying your storage bills. One advantage of self-storage is that you maintain full control of the firearms and retrieving your guns doesn't involve a background check.

**B/\$ Gun shops** – Policies vary regarding short-term storage of firearms. Gun shops may offer storage only for regular customers, in an emergency or at the request of local police. In these cases, the gun shop must log the firearms into their inventory and you will have to pass a background check to retrieve them. Most shops charge a fee for storage and/or for their administrative costs.

**\$ Shooting ranges** – Some ranges offer storage facilities for their members. Only you have the key and there is no need for a background check when you retrieve the guns. Others may be willing to take firearms on a temporary basis in an emergency particularly for their members or regular customers.

**B/\$ Pawn shops** – Pawn shops will generally take guns in exchange for a “loan” and charge a monthly interest fee (e.g. on a loan of \$100 at 20%, the interest owed every month will be \$20). To retrieve the guns you must repay the loan, pay all interest due, pass a background check, and fill out federal firearm paperwork.

**B Police Departments-** Almost all departments will take firearms on a PERMANENT basis.

Many will take firearms on a short-term, emergency basis, if they are given voluntarily.

- Call and speak with an officer to arrange temporary storage. In some jurisdictions, the department will send an officer to pick up the firearms. In others, you will be instructed to drop them off unloaded.
- To retrieve your property, contact the officer you gave it to and have paper work confirming that the gun is your property. You may or may not need to pass a background check to retrieve them. Obtain this information when dropping them off.

### **Options to reduce access if removing from home isn't possible**

- Lock all firearms in a safe or in a lock box.
- Change combinations and/or key locations (Combinations are generally considered more secure as long as it is not the “usual” combination)
- Store all firearms unloaded
- Lock ammunition separately or remove all ammunition from the home
- Remove a key component of firearms – such as the firing pin or the bolt

### **What about a self-defense gun?**

Consider the probabilities of a suicide attempt by the person at risk versus the risk of home invasion during the near future

- If self-defense is determined to still be essential, keep the self-defense gun either in a quick access lock box or on your person at all times. Take steps as described above to reduce access to other firearms
- If the gun owner is the person at risk, seek therapeutic approaches and/or creative solutions to reducing access if suicidal. e.g. put pictures of loved ones on the lock box or add the Suicide Lifeline number to locking devices.

### **Reducing access to firearms is only one part of a Suicide Prevention Plan to help keep an individual safe. Here are other things that should be done:**

- Reduce access to other means of suicide (though almost all are less lethal than firearms)
- Offer or seek support from friends and family. Feeling connected is one of the key strategies for preventing suicide
- Seek assistance in addressing any mental or physical health and/or substance use disorders
- Be alert for any specific situations or events that may increase risk – relationship issues, financial or legal problems for example
- With the person at risk, develop a Safety Plan for how to respond if and when suicidal thoughts return
- **Keep the Suicide Lifeline number – 1-800-273-8255 – available at all times. Dial “1” for Veterans**