



Suicide Safety: Precautions at Home

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Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for children, teens, and young adults in the United States. Although attempting and completing suicide is more common in children with depression and other mood disorders, impulsive suicide attempts can occur in those with no known history of mental illness. We now know that families can make homes safer, helping to protect children and teens. Even if you have made your home safer, if your child is talking about thoughts or plans of suicide, they should be urgently evaluated by a qualified mental health provider. Although, it is not possible to make a home perfectly safe, following these suggestions can help reduce the risks and chance for a suicide attempt.

Sources of Risk in the Home

Weapons

Research shows that having a gun or weapon in the home increases the risk of dying by suicide.

- Guns should be stored unloaded in a locked safe. Bullets should be also locked, but in a separate place.
- Gun safe keys or combination to the lock should be kept only by the adults in the house.
- Consider purchasing trigger locks for guns.
- When children and teens go to friends or relatives' homes, ask about gun ownership and storage.
- Lock away knives, razor blades, and other sharp objects from children and teens.

Medications

Parents and caregivers should be in charge of the medications that are kept in the home.

- Keep all medications, both prescribed and non-prescribed (over the counter), in a locked box.
- An adult should hand out and control all prescribed and over the counter medications to children and adolescents.
- Keep track of all bottles of medication as well as the number of pills in each container, including those prescribed as over the counter medications (such as pain relief, allergy pills, vitamins, and supplements, etc) for every person and any pets in the home.
- Dispose of all expired and no longer used prescribed medications by bringing them to your local pharmacy or fire station.
- Ask the parents of your child's friends how their medications are stored in their home.

If substances that can be abused are kept in the home, they should be monitored and locked.

- Keep track of bottles of alcohol and lock them away. It is not enough to put these items "out of reach."

- If marijuana is kept in the home, lock all forms of it in a lock box that only adults in the house have the lock or combination to.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends about how they store alcohol or marijuana in the home.

Other items can be used for self-harm and suicide.

- Keep your vehicle keys with you at all times or consider locking them in a lock box when not in use.
- Lock all toxic household cleaners, pesticides, and industrial chemicals away.
- Consider limiting ropes, electrical wire, and long cords within the home or lock them away.
- Secure and lock high level windows and access to rooftops.

Parents and caregivers should monitor the online activities of their children, watching for:

- Researching methods of suicide
- Purchasing of any materials or items that could be used for self-harm
- Spending time in chatrooms or social media sites dedicated to self-harm or suicide
- Receiving texts or direct messages from peers about suicide, calls for help or peer bullying

The risk of dying by suicide can be decreased when families and caregivers reduce access to ways children can harm themselves. Following these steps can help to improve safety in your home. If you are concerned that your child has been exhibiting signs that they are thinking about suicide, or expressing feelings of hopelessness or depression, please seek help from a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional immediately for an emergency evaluation.

Related Facts For Families

- [What is a Psychiatric Emergency?](#)
- [Threats by Children: When are they Serious?](#)
- [Self-Injury in Adolescents](#)
- [Teen Suicide](#)

Other AACAP Resources

- [Suicide Resource Center](#)
- [Depression Resource Center](#)
- [Anxiety Resource Center](#)

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