

Safe Home Environment

Better storage practices can help make the home safe and save lives.

Together We Can. 

*Suicide Prevention Information for Veterans,
Their Families, and Caregivers*

A Safe Home Environment Can Save Lives

Better storage practices of potentially harmful things can help make the home safe and save lives.



Thoughts about suicide are often short-lived. A safe home environment can buy you, or a person you're concerned about, time to get help. Safely storing things that can be used to harm oneself, such as firearms and medications, or removing them from your home — even temporarily — can save lives.

Most suicides occur in the home and involve firearms — by far the most common and lethal of the means used in suicides. Others may involve household objects or substances used in a harmful way.

Contrary to popular belief, people who are suicidal generally don't seek other ways to attempt suicide if they can't access the method they were going to use. Nor will they attempt suicide if safeguards are in place to make using that method more difficult. For example, someone who plans to use a firearm likely won't try to hang or poison themselves if their firearm is safely stored or isn't in their home.

Creating a safe home environment for those with suicidal thoughts or tendencies can greatly reduce the likelihood of death by suicide.

How to Protect Yourself and Others During a Crisis

Even if you or someone you know is not at risk for suicide, homes are safer when you safely store firearms. Safe storage practices include using cable or trigger locks, storing firearms in a locked case or safe, and storing firearms and ammunition separately and locked. Learn more about ways to safely secure firearms and find the storage option that works best for you and your family at the National Shooting Sports Foundation website: (www.nssf.org/safety).



VA has partnered with the National Shooting Sports Foundation to end suicide deaths by firearm. Check out these efforts at www.nssf.org/safety/suicide-prevention.

If you or someone you know has a firearm and is at immediate risk for suicide, temporarily removing firearms from the home may be the best way to ensure safety. Consult your state and local laws for further guidance.

Another way to stay safe is to keep only as much prescription medication as you need. Store any sedative, narcotic, or opioid medications under lock and key (medication lockboxes are available at any pharmacy). Also, discard outdated or unneeded medications at any pharmacy near you. VA will also take back medications you don't need. Ask your local VA pharmacy for details on disposal bins and options or visit the VA Center for Medication Safety website for more information: www.pbm.va.gov/pbm/vacenterformedicationsafety/vacenterformedicationsafetyprescriptionsafety.asp.

Also, during a crisis, remove other household items that could be used to harm oneself, such as ropes, cords, and sharp objects.

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Be There for a Veteran in Your Life

You don't need special training to **Be There** for someone who may be in crisis. Everyone can play a role in preventing Veteran suicide. Approaching the subject may seem difficult, but it is crucial to start the conversation. For more information, visit BeThereForVeterans.com.



Get Immediate Help



Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, should contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:

- Call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**.
- Send a text message to **838255**.
- Chat online VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

For more ways to find help, visit VeteransCrisisLine.net/Get-Help/Local-Resources.



Know the Signs

Signs of a suicidal crisis may vary for each person but could include changes in mood and activities, an increase in alcohol or drug use, expressions of hopelessness, agitation, or withdrawal from others. If you notice these behaviors, **Be There** for the person in need.



Ask the Questions

VA, in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute (psycharmor.org), developed the S.A.V.E. online training video, which describes how you can act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- S** – Recognize the **signs** of suicidal thinking.
 - A** – **Ask** the question: Are you thinking of ending your life?
 - V** – **Validate** the Veteran's experience.
 - E** – **Encourage** treatment and **expedite** getting help.
- Access the S.A.V.E. training on BeThereForVeterans.com.



Resources for Veterans, Families, Friends, and Caregivers

- **Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) for Suicide Prevention** provides lethal means safety information, resources, and counseling for Veterans and their families. Visit www.mirecc.va.gov/lethalmeanssafety.
- **VA Caregiver Support** can connect you with a local Caregiver Support Coordinator and offer additional resources. Visit www.caregiver.va.gov or call 855-260-3274.
- **Coaching Into Care** aims to educate, support, and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a Veteran. Call 888-823-7458 or visit www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching.
- **Make The Connection** connects Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with information and solutions to issues affecting their lives. Visit MakeTheConnection.net.
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)** partnered with VA to prevent service member and Veteran suicide through a nationwide community empowered by research and education. Learn more about AFSP's firearms and suicide prevention program at afsp.org/about-suicide/firearms-and-suicide-prevention.
- **National Shooting Sports Foundation** offers a wide range of resources and helpful information related to the safe handling and storage of firearms, including resources offered through its partnership with AFSP. Visit www.nssf.org/safety.