

SAMPLE ARTICLE #2

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How to use this article: Use in publications such as retirement center newsletters, newspapers that cover aging and senior lifestyles, senior centers, church bulletins, etc.

Take Action – Save a Life

As somebody's friend or loved one, you are in a powerful position to speak up if you are concerned that a person you know is considering suicide. Offering support, understanding the warning signs of suicide, and knowing where to go for help are all great things to do to help someone get through a tough time. However, often there is one thing that we overlook that can have a significant impact on reducing suicide risk – reducing access to lethal means.

Although any suicide method can be lethal, firearms are one of the most deadly: they are quick, and often irreversible. Unlike other methods, there is no time to reconsider or call for help. In California, firearm-related suicides accounted for nearly half of all suicide deaths that occurred in 2009. One reason for the high rate of firearm suicides is the lethality of this means. Access is also relatively easy to come by – one in three Americans say that they own at least one gun.

Suicides can seem to be planned out, but many of them are impulsive and happen when the person is in a crisis situation. Reducing access to lethal means like firearms will not necessarily change the fact that the person feels suicidal, but it can reduce the lethality of any suicide attempt, and it can also reduce the impulsivity of a suicide attempt. This gives family, friends and other helpers the crucial time they need to reach out and help address the person's suicidal thoughts.

If you are concerned for someone, you don't have to wait until that person talks about what method they intend on using. Even if you don't feel ready to bring up the topic of suicide with them, you can do a lot of things in the meantime to help reduce the chances that the person will have access to potential means.

Unload, lock up and remove firearms. Since firearms are the most lethal among suicide methods, it is particularly important that you remove them until things improve at home. At the very least, lock them in a secure place.

Call your local law enforcement agency for advice. They may be able to store your firearm, or provide information on places you can safely store them such as a local gun club or a safety deposit box.

Reduce the amount of medications in the home. Don't keep lethal doses within reach. Your doctor, pharmacist or the California Poison Control System (1-800-222-1222) can help you determine a safe amount to keep at home.

Keep only small amounts of alcohol at home. Alcohol use can increase the risk of impulsively attempting suicide.

Learn more about reducing access to lethal means. The Means Matter Campaign (www.meansmatter.org), a program of the Harvard School of Public Health, provides information about suicide and lethal means and resources that can help.

Learn more about the warning signs of suicide and how to talk to someone about suicide. Knowing what to look for and addressing suicide directly is the best way to get through to someone and show them that you care. The Know the Signs campaign helps Californians learn what to look for and how to broach the topic of whether they are thinking of suicide. Visit the Know the Signs website at www.SuicideisPreventable.org.

If you are a clinician, take the Counseling on Access to Lethal Means course. This free online training is designed for providers, including mental health providers, clergy and social workers, who counsel people at risk for suicide. It offers practical skills on how and when to ask suicidal clients about their access to lethal means and how to work with them and their families to reduce access. This training was developed by Means Matter in collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Take the course at <http://training.sprc.org>.

Always remember – the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is there to support you and help you find local resources. Anybody who is concerned for someone else can use this free, round-the-clock service to talk to a trained crisis counselor.

If you are suicidal, you are not alone and help is always available. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) any time, day or night, to talk to a trained crisis counselor who can help you through this tough time. If you are a Veteran, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1 to speak to a trained crisis counselor who understands unique challenges that Veterans and their families can face.

In _____ County, the _____ [agency/program] is available to help. Contact them at _____.