

988 PREVENTION AND SAFER HOMES COLLABORATION

Lunch and Learn Series

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MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH &
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Missouri Department of
MENTAL HEALTH

988

PREVENTION AND SAFER HOMES

Suicide prevention is not only about crisis response—it's also about reducing access to lethal means during moments of emotional distress. One of the most effective ways to prevent suicide is by creating time, space, and distance between a person in crisis and the methods they might use to harm themselves. This is especially important in homes where firearms are present. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, combined with practical safety steps at home, can save lives.

WHY LETHAL MEANS SAFETY MATTERS

Many people who consider suicide experience intense but temporary emotional states. In these moments, access to a firearm dramatically increases the likelihood of a fatal attempt. Research consistently shows that:

- Firearms are the most lethal method of suicide
- Impulsive decisions with highly lethal means often allow no chance for rescue
- Creating delays—through locks, safes, or temporary removal—can interrupt a crisis long enough for help to arrive

Reducing access does not take away someone's autonomy—it's an act of care. These steps give a person more time, more safety, and more opportunities to choose life.



THE POWER OF 988

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides immediate, confidential support 24/7. Anyone can call or text 988 when they are:

- Thinking about suicide
- Worried about a loved one
- Struggling with emotional pain
- Unsure how to handle a crisis at home

Encouraging people to contact 988 is one of the simplest and most effective ways to connect them with trained support during difficult moments.

SAFE FIREARM STORAGE SAVES LIVES

For households with firearms, secure storage is an essential protective measure. Safe storage can include:

- Storing firearms in a gun safe
- Using gun locks (which are difficult to cut, even with tools)
- Removing ammunition and magazines
- Temporarily transferring firearms to a trusted person
- Using off-site storage options such as law enforcement or gun shops

The goal is not to eliminate firearms—it's to create time and distance. Even 30 seconds of delay can disrupt a moment of intense crisis.

Families, friends, and gun owners can work together to decide what level of storage makes sense during times of stress, grief, or mental health challenges.

RECOGNIZING WHEN SOMEONE MAY BE AT RISK

People rarely say outright, “I’m suicidal.” More often, they show signs that something is wrong. Some warning signs include:

- Change in mood, behavior, or sleep
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Giving away cherished items
- Talking about feeling hopeless or being a burden
- Sudden withdrawal from others

When these signs appear in a home with firearms, it’s essential to take them seriously and have a direct, compassionate conversation.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

These conversations should happen somewhere private, familiar, and safe. Begin with concern, not judgment:

- “Because I care about you, I’m worried about how you’ve been doing lately.”
- “I’ve noticed you’re drinking more and not sleeping well. Are you okay?”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”

Asking directly does not increase risk—it opens a door. If the answer is no, reaffirm your care and remind them that 988 is always available. If the answer is yes, thank them for their honesty, express your concern for their safety, and stay with them as you connect them to more support.



WORKING TOGETHER TO INCREASE SAFETY

When someone is at risk and has access to firearms, the next step is to collaboratively reduce danger:

- Suggest temporarily storing firearms off-site
- Offer to hold a firearm or component (such as a firing pin)
- Change a safe combination so the person cannot access it during a crisis
- Remove ammunition or separate key parts
- Involve trusted friends or family who can help

These actions demonstrate care, respect, and a commitment to safety—not punishment or judgment.

BUILDING SAFER HOMES FOR EVERYONE

Firearm safety is just one part of creating a safer home environment. Many households already practice other safety measures, such as using smoke detectors, window guards, or childproofing tools. Lethal means safety fits within this same mindset: preventing harm by preparing ahead of time.

Gun owners play a crucial role in preventing suicide by:

- Talking openly about temporary safe storage
- Supporting family and friends during crisis
- Advocating for responsible firearm practices
- Sharing 988 resources with others

These efforts help protect everyone in the home, especially children and teens, who may be curious or impulsive around unsecured firearms.

TAKING ACTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

You can help prevent suicide by taking a few key steps:

- Check in on loved ones who may be struggling
- Talk openly about mental health and safety
- Encourage safe firearm storage during stressful times
- Share the 988 Lifeline as a resource
- Promote this training within your workplace or community

Small actions—like asking a direct question, offering to store a firearm, or calling 988 together—can interrupt a crisis and save a life.

MOVING FORWARD

988 prevention and lethal means safety are grounded in compassion: noticing when someone is hurting, asking directly about suicide, and making the environment safer until the crisis passes. These conversations can feel difficult, but they are among the most powerful tools we have for keeping people alive.

Safer homes, caring communities, and open dialogue about mental health all work together to protect the people we care about most.

ACTIVITY: YOUR SUICIDE PREVENTION SAFETY STEPS

Take a moment to identify a few concrete actions you can take to support safety for yourself, your family, and your community.

1. Know the Lifeline

Write down the crisis numbers you'll keep accessible:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

2. Plan for Safe Storage

If someone is struggling, temporary off-site firearm storage can save lives. **Where could safe storage happen in your community or family?**

3. Start One Conversation

Who is one person you can talk to this week about lethal means safety or this training?

Person: _____

How I'll bring it up: _____



4. Share the Training

One way I can help spread this training:

REMEMBER

Reducing access to lethal means during a crisis saves lives. You can make a difference—one step and one conversation at a time.

More resources: **dmh.mo.gov**

