

# LETHAL MEANS SAFETY TOOLKIT



## FACT SHEET

Lethal Means are methods used in a suicide attempt. 580 service members died by suicide in 2020, 64.3% of Active-duty, 75.3% of Reserve, and 79.8% of National Guard by firearm (DoD, ASR). Research has shown that a suicide attempt can occur within 5-10 minutes from idea to action. Lethal means safety is the practice of safely storing means that could be used in a suicide attempt. Increasing time and distance between an individual in crisis and a lethal mean allows for intervention and reconsideration. These simple actions can save lives!



Statistics reveal making lethal means less accessible has reduced death by suicide by 91%."



Studies state approx. 90% of attempters who survive a nonfatal attempt, will not try again."

### EASY SAFETY STORAGE PRACTICES:

#### Ways to safely store firearms:

- Use a gunlock
- Disassembling the gun and place in a lockbox/safe
- Separately storing gun and ammunition

#### To prevent overdose, store/dispose medication:

- Take individually packaged pills
- Throw out expired medication
- Portion medication for the week and lock in a cabinet

#### Deter asphyxiation by reducing access to ligatures (ie: ropes, cords, and belts):

- Use specialized bed sheets resistant to tearing
- Purchase cordless appliances/electronics

#### Substitute/hide everyday sharp objects:

- Use knife covers and safes/locks
- Keep tools locked in sheds

#### Avoid chemicals/poisons:

- Purchase green/organic cleaning products or repellents that do not include toxic ingredients or pesticides
- Add carbon monoxide detectors to the house

### RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR SOLDIERS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND CIVILIANS.

Counseling on Access to Lethal Means or [CALM](#) is a training course that counsels individuals who work with people at risk and their Families providing information on how to reduce access.

Ask, Care, Escort or [ACE](#) is a training model offered by the Army that educates Soldiers and Family members on methods of prevention.

The [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) is a federally supported resource center funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA.

The [Army Suicide Prevention Program](#) or SP2 is a campaign that provides resources, builds awareness, and supports Soldiers and Families with suicide prevention tools.

DOD Lethal Means Safety Tools and Information: <https://www.dspo.mil/Tools/Download-Library/lethalmeanssafety/>

Properly storing lethal means and staying informed by taking advantage of suicide prevention resources available to Soldiers and their Families will significantly save lives. Adding time and space between an individual and lethal means makes a world of difference. Make every second count.



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**ARMY  
RESILIENCE  
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**SP2**  
SUICIDE PREVENTION  
PROGRAM

Military Crisis Line: Dial 988 and press 1  
In Europe, dial 00-800-1273-8255  
In Korea, dial 0808-555-118  
[www.armyresilience.army.mil](http://www.armyresilience.army.mil)



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## Tiplist for Commanders



To prevent death by suicide, PAOs and Command Teams may use the following tiplist to effectively communicate how to secure and safely use lethal means.

- Start the Conversation**  
If you notice a Soldier's unusual behavior, try the following approach:
    - 🔒 "I've had a rough day. How's yours going?"
    - 🔒 "Visiting the Chaplain really helped clear my mind. Have you thought of stopping by?"
    - 🔒 "Are you having thoughts of suicide? Let's talk."
  - Use Adaptive Messaging**  
Even on the same installation there are different living/working environments and populations – each with unique lethal means safety requirements and challenges. Adapt your communications for each specific audience.
  - When Developing Messaging Consider**
    - 🔒 Housing arrangement: Barracks, On-post, Off-post
    - 🔒 Single, Family or Roommate status
    - 🔒 Component; Active, Guard, Reserve
    - 🔒 Rank
    - 🔒 Age/time in service
    - 🔒 Exposure to discussions on suicide and mental health
    - 🔒 Background
  - Communicate Safe Storage Options in a Positive Manner**  
Anything that disrupts a suicide attempt can save an individual. Every second counts. Safe storage of lethal means can provide these life-saving seconds.
    - 🔒 Highlight safe storage options for all lethal means: firearms, drugs and weapons.
    - 🔒 Options in the home: gun locks, safes, storage of ammunition, drugs out of reach of young Family members
    - 🔒 Promote options for storing firearms outside the home: police departments, firearms shops, armory, or shooting range
  - Normalize the Conversation**  
Make lethal means safety discussions a part of your organization's normal conversations.
    - 🔒 Include lethal means topics in all weekend, drill, and holiday safety briefs
    - 🔒 Routinely post lethal means safety content on social media platforms
    - 🔒 Share what you are doing as leader to address lethal means safety
    - 🔒 Promote through installation newspapers and magazines
    - 🔒 Discuss with unit Family organizations
  - Address Misconceptions with Facts – not Opinions or Perceptions**  
DOD studies indicate that over half of service members believe that if someone wants to act on suicide, they will find a way. This is not true. Other misconceptions exist, both locally and Army-wide. Address them using statistics and research from credible sources.
    - 🔒 Focus messaging on evidence-based recommendations
    - 🔒 Show correlation between securing lethal means and suicide prevention
- Resources**
- 🔒 Army Resilience Directorate website: <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/suicide-prevention/index.html>
  - 🔒 DSPO Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide: <https://go.usa.gov/xJ6Kb>
  - 🔒 DOD Lethal Means Communication Guide: <https://go.usa.gov/xJ6KN>



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# LETHAL MEANS SAFETY TOOLKIT

## Tips for Keeping Your Family Safe



By securing our homes and limiting access to lethal means, we can protect our Families and prevent the unnecessary loss of life or injury. The following tips can help you create a safer home for your loved ones, as well as identify and address possible warning signs.



### Talk About Firearms and Safety

If you need to store a firearm in your home, unload and lock it away (out of reach) with the ammunition separate from the gun. Have a conversation as a Family to discuss:

- Why your child/teen should not touch or handle a firearm while unsupervised.
- How feelings such as anger, sadness, or fear should be expressed without using weapons.
- Healthy ways to express feelings.
- Who to talk to if they ever feel unsafe.
- The differences between violence on television/movies and violence in real life.



### Prevent Problems with Medicine

Both prescription and over-the-counter medications can be dangerous if they are not handled properly. Portion out the medicine you need for the week and lock away the remainder out of your child's/teen's reach. Also, be sure to:

- Avoid keeping lethal doses of medications in your home.
- Dispose of unwanted, unused, or expired medications at your nearest hospital or pharmacy.



### Watch for Warning Signs in Your Loved Ones

The first person someone turns to when they're in distress is often a spouse or Family member. If you notice a loved one exhibiting these signs, it's okay to ask if they're thinking of suicide.

- Dramatic shift in mood
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Withdrawing from Family, friends, or activities
- Hopelessness
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- No sense of purpose in life
- Engaging in risky activities
- Uncontrollable anger
- Giving away prized possessions



### If You're Worried, Start the Conversation

It can be challenging to talk with a Family member when they're struggling. Start the conversation by asking:

- "I've noticed you don't seem like yourself!"** Let your loved one know that you've noticed a change and that you're concerned about them.
- "Is everything okay at home/work/school?"** Specific questions can start the conversation, but it's important to remember that their feelings may be a combination of experiences and not a specific incident.
- "I've had a terrible week, how was yours?"** Break the ice by sharing your life also isn't perfect and that you understand. Remember to listen without judgment and take them seriously.
- "Are you thinking about suicide?"** This can be the hardest question to ask, but it's important to know if a loved one is seriously considering suicide.

### For more Information:

- Army Resilience Directorate website: <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/suicide-prevention/index.html>
- Defense Suicide Prevention Office website: <https://www.dspo.mil/>
- VA Lethal Means Safety and Suicide Prevention <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/lethalmeanssafety/>
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org/help-someone-else/>
- DOD Lethal Means Safety Tools and Information: <https://www.dspo.mil/Tools/Download-Library/lethalmeanssafety/>

If you need additional support, dial 988 and press 1 for the Military Crisis Line or visit <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help-now/military-crisis-line/>.



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