

SUPPORTING SAFETY: FAMILY HANDOUT

Your child's health and safety is our #1 priority. We use a screening tool created by the National Institute of Mental Health specifically for youth and children called the *ASQ: Ask Suicide-Screening Questions*. You can find more information about this screening at [nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials).

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth. Please note that asking youth questions about suicide is safe and is very important for suicide prevention. Research has shown that asking youth about thoughts of suicide is not harmful and does not put thoughts or ideas into their heads.

Although attempting and completing suicide is more common in youth with depression and other mood disorders, impulsive suicide attempts can occur in those with no known history of mental illness. Families can make homes safer, helping to protect children and teens. 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.

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.

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

- 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.

Other substances

- 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 key 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.
- Lock away all toxic household cleaners, pesticides, and industrial chemicals.
- 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.

Online activities

- 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 chat rooms 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.

Additional resources:

- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or Text 988 or Chat at 988lifeline.org/chat
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Virginia Chapter: afsp.org/chapter/virginia





INDIVIDUAL SAFETY PLAN (for youth to complete)

Make the environment safe: remove access ex: lock up medications	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
Warning signs and vulnerabilities ex: not getting my homework done	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
Things I can do on my own to distract me ex: listen to favorite band	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
People who can help distract me ex: my brother	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
Adults I can ask for help ex: my parent, my neighbor	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
Future goals and things I'm looking forward to	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Professionals I can ask for help:

My therapist: _____ Phone: _____

My provider: _____ Phone: _____

My psychiatrist: _____ Phone: _____

If my health care provider is not available and I find myself preparing for suicide, I'll call _____ (person/agency) at _____ (number) for emergency help.

If I feel that I can't control my suicidal behavior, I'll go to the nearest emergency department or call 911.

24-Hour Crisis Hotlines

- Crisis Text Line **Text: HOME to 741-741**
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline **Phone or Text: 988**
- National Hopeline Network **Phone: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)**

Local Emergency Room or call 911

Adapted from: GMU Center for Psychological Services