

Talking with Military Service Members and Veterans about Secure Firearm Storage

Secure firearm storage is an important component of firearm safety and suicide prevention. This guide is designed to help individuals who work with military service members and veterans have respectful, supportive conversations about storage options and safety planning. These conversations can play an important role in safeguarding veterans, their families, and their communities.

Many people worry that raising the topic of firearm secure storage may feel uncomfortable or damage connection. However, research shows that most veterans find these conversations acceptable when they are approached with respect and genuine concern. Recent research by [Cohen Veterans Network – Institute for Quality \(CVN-IQ\)](#) found that veterans, service members, and their families responded most positively to conversations that were sincere, direct, straightforward, and grounded in concern for their well-being.

This guide provides key data points, storage resources, and practical strategies to help you start conversations about secure firearm storage and support individuals in developing a storage plan that fits their needs and circumstances.

WHY IS SECURE FIREARM STORAGE IMPORTANT

- Military members & veterans are trained and entrusted to be weapons bearers. They have an opportunity to set an example for what right looks like in this area.
- Secure firearm storage is a core responsibility of firearm ownership and helps protect against misuse, injury, and loss.
- Firearms are highly lethal. Split-second decisions and impulses may have tragic and irreversible consequences.
- Firearm related injuries are a leading cause of death among children in the US. Secure storage practices helps prevent unauthorized access and protects young people from harm.
- Unsecured firearms in homes and vehicles are at greater risk of theft. Stolen firearms are often used in criminal activity.
- Anyone can experience crisis. Secure storage can provide an additional layer of protection during periods of stress, crisis, or suicidal thoughts.

HOW CAN SECURE STORAGE HELP

Secure firearm storage helps protect your family, community, and firearms by **preventing unauthorized access.**

Suicidal crises are typically **brief**, with most lasting less than 10 minutes. Secure firearm storage creates critical time and distance, **reducing the risk of a fatal outcome.**

SECURE STORAGE RECOMMENDATIONS

 OUTSIDE THE HOME	 INSIDE THE HOME
The most secure option during periods of elevated risk is to temporarily store firearms outside of the home. If you or someone in your household is experiencing a mental health crisis or period of overwhelming life circumstances, voluntary temporary storage outside of your home can add an important layer of protection while preserving your ability to regain access to your firearm(s) later. These resources provide information about voluntary storage programs available through firearm retailers and guidance on legally storing a firearm with a trusted friend or loved one. Temporarily relinquishing access during a crisis is a sign of strength and good judgement. Securely storing firearms for a friend or colleague (assuming you feel comfortable) is buddy care at its finest and will be appreciated.	For firearms kept at home, store them unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. Whether preventing unauthorized access by children or creating time and distance during a crisis, secure storage can help reduce the risk of injury, suicide, and theft. Check out this guide to in-home storage options.

ASK ANYWAY: CONVERSATION GUIDE

HOW TO START A CONVERSATION

Many people hesitate to bring up secure firearm storage because they worry it may upset someone. However, research shows that most veterans find these conversations acceptable and that they are open to discussing firearm safety.

Studies, including recent research from CVN-IQ, suggest that there are many effective ways to approach the topic. Rather than focusing on finding the perfect words, focus on having a respectful, direct, and supportive conversation that meets the needs of the person in front of you.

 WHAT DOESN'T WORK	
○ Assumptions about someone's mental health or level of risk. ○ Framing the conversation as taking away access or interfering with their rights. ○ Using fear-based, judgmental, or confrontational language. ○ Assuming all firearm owners have the same needs or reasons for ownership. ○ Waiting until the crisis occurs to discuss safety planning.	
 WHAT DOES WORK	
Lead with respect . Acknowledge and understand the role firearms play in a person's life.	<i>"I know firearms are important for your family's hunting traditions" or "I hear how your pistol gives you extra peace of mind for home security."</i>
Focus on protection and home safety rather than restriction.	<i>"Securely storing firearms is one way to make sure your home is safe for everyone in it, as unsecured firearms can increase the risk of accidental injuries and suicide for you and your family."</i>
Use collaborative language	<i>"It sounds like we both value safety when it comes to having firearms in your home. Do you mind if we talk about that a bit more?"</i>
Emphasize temporary, voluntary steps during stressful periods.	<i>"Creating a temporary secure storage plan during a period where you've been experiencing suicidal thinking, is similar to creating a designated driver plan when you're going out for the night and expecting to have a few drinks. In both situations, we want to increase safety during a temporary period of vulnerability."</i>
Connect secure storage to protecting loved ones and preventing accidental injury .	<i>"Can you think of any situations in which it might be dangerous to have a loaded firearm unsecured in the home? Secure storage is not only a resource in suicide prevention but also in preventing accidental injuries."</i>
Normalize the conversation as part of everyday safety planning .	<i>"Talking about firearm safety is a normal part of how we plan for safety and well-being, just as we might talk about wearing seatbelts in cars or securing medications and cleaners around children. Secure firearm storage is another important element of reducing risks at home."</i>

NEXT STEPS

1. **Decide whether in-home or out-of-home storage is the best fit for your situation.** Consider your needs, living situation, and any current safety concerns.
2. **Review available storage options.** Learn about both in-home and out-of-home storage resources to identify the approach that works best for you.
3. **Create a concrete secure storage plan.** Having a specific plan makes it easier to take action when needed.
 - **Out-of-home storage:** Will you store your firearm with a trusted friend or family member, the armory at your military installation, or at a participating firearm retailer? [Identify your preferred option and locate available resources.](#)
 - **In-home storage:** What storage method best meets your needs? Consider where firearms will be stored, how they will be secured, and where ammunition will be stored separately. [Firearm Storage Guide.](#)
4. **Follow up when possible.** Checking in can help support plan implementation, address barriers, and reinforce the importance of secure storage over time.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

The best storage plan is one that is **secure**, **practical**, and **realistic** for your situation. Discussing options and making a plan in advance can help you act quickly when it matters most.