



CALM Counsel on Access to Lethal Means

Presented by
Keri Neblett, LMSW
Keri-Neblett@uiowa.edu

Developed by
Dr Mark Ciocca and Elaine Frank
elaine.m.frank@dartmouth.edu



Before we begin



- Introductions
- What CALM is and isn't
 - Specific and effective PART of Suicide Prevention
 - Not suicide risk assessment
 - Not THE answer but should be included
- Suicide is **generally** preventable
- **Anti-suicide not anti-gun or anti-drugs**



Traditionally suicide prevention has focused on who takes their life, when, where, and especially why.



We are beginning to understand that how people attempt suicide plays a crucial role in whether they live or die.

Sri Lanka & Pesticides

- Pesticides are the leading suicide method in Sri Lanka.
- Restrictions were placed on sales of the most highly human-toxic pesticides in the mid to late 1990s.
- Suicide rates dropped 50% from 1996 to 2005.
- Nonfatal poisonings and suicide by other methods did not drop.



Gunnell 2007. Int'l J of Epidemiology.

United Kingdom & Domestic Gas

- Before 1960, domestic gas was the leading method of suicide in the United Kingdom.
- By 1970, almost all domestic gas in the UK was non-toxic.
- Suicide rates dropped by nearly a third.
- The drop was driven by a drop in gas suicides; non-gas suicides increased slightly.



Source: Kreitman 1976, Brit J Prev Soc Med.

Firearms – Israeli Military

- The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is a population-based army with mandatory draft for 18-21 year-olds
- From 2003- 2005, an average of 28 suicides occurred each year, 26 by firearm, many on weekends.
- In 2006, IDF required soldiers to leave their weapons on base during weekend leaves.
- The suicide rate decreased by 40%.
- Weekend suicides dropped significantly.
- Weekday suicides did not.



Lubin 2010, Suic & Life-Threat Behavior.

Reducing Access to Lethal Means

Make highly lethal means less accessible



Attempt suicide with less lethal means
or
Delay suicide attempt



Why do it?

- Proven to be an effective intervention and many people will not switch to another means
- Part of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and in the Iowa Suicide Prevention Plan
- Most suicidal people are ambivalent
- The actual act of suicide is often made very quickly - particularly among young people



What Means to Focus On?

- * Frequency
- * Lethality
- * Decision Time
- * Availability
- * Cultural Differences



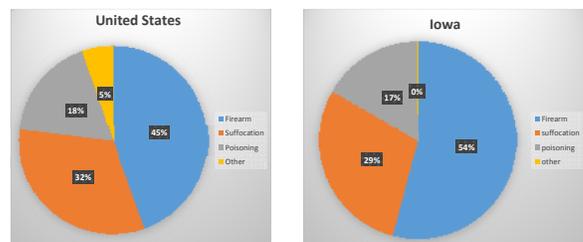
Why Focus on Firearms

- Firearms are the leading suicide method in the U.S.
- Gun owners and their families are at about 3 times higher risk of suicide than non-gun owners.
- This isn't because they're more suicidal. Gun owners are NO more likely to be mentally ill, to think about suicide, or to attempt suicide than non-gun owners.
- Rather, they're more likely to die in a suicide attempt because guns are more lethal than most other methods.

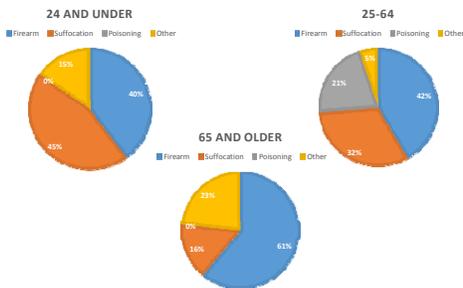
Sources:

- Betz M, Suicide Life Threat Behavior, 2011. Miller M, Injury Prevention, 2009. Ilgen M, Psychiatr Serv, 2008. Sorenson & Vitti, Eval Rev, 2008.

Methods of Suicide 2015



Suicide Method by Age in Iowa



Decision Time

Among survivors of near fatal suicides, when asked about time from their decision to complete suicide and the attempt:

- 24% said less than 5 minutes
- 47% more said an hour or less

**Putting time and distance
between a suicidal person
and lethal means MAY save a life**



Talking to family about reducing lethal means

Key Principles:

- Inform about situational risk
- Inquire about means availability – if appropriate
- Discuss benefit of reducing access
- Focus on **increasing safety** not on issues of trust or guns
- Language matters



Principles and Rationale:

- Once there has been a threat or an attempt, probabilities have shifted.
- Firearms used in a youth suicide almost always come from the victim's home.
- Parents underestimate the likelihood that a young person can access guns



Principles and Rationale

- Trigger locks are not reliably effective for adolescents
- Familiarity with firearms may increase rather than decrease risk



Principles and Rationale

- When a gun is used, there is little chance for a good outcome.
- Accessibility, impulsivity, and emotionality are interactive and potentially dangerous.

**Conducting a Home Firearms Assessment**

- Involve all adults, including especially males.
- Assess for multiple households.
- How many firearms are in the home?

**Conducting a Home Firearms Assessment**

- How are the firearms stored and secured?
- What type of safety measures are currently in place?
- Is ammunition accessible?

**Conducting a Home Firearms Assessment**

- Who uses the gun(s) or has knowledge of their use?
- Is access to firearms a job requirement for someone in the home?

**Conducting a Home Firearms Assessment**

- If firearms are kept loaded and accessible, why is that the case?
- What changes can be made to **increase the safety** of the situation?

**Conducting a Home Firearms Assessment**

- Is there someone trusted to hold firearms if they are removed?
- What barriers or obstacles exist to their removal?
- Can a solution be found?
- Follow up and document



Reducing Access to Firearms

- **Temporarily removing all firearms from the home is the most effective option**
 - Where to store them?
 - Family and friends (if legally able to have guns)
 - Police in jurisdictions where they are willing*
 - Gun shops and ranges, pawn shops, shooting clubs*
- *Background checks and/or fees may apply

Other options to reduce access if removal is not acceptable

- Lock **all** firearms in a safe or in a lock box.
- Change combinations and/or key locations
- Store all firearms unloaded
- Lock ammunition separately or remove ammunition from the home
- Remove a key component of firearms – such as the bolt

What about a self-defense gun ?

- First, discuss probabilities of suicide attempt by person at risk versus risk of home invasion
- If self-defense is essential, keep the self-defense gun either in a quick access lock box or on their person (in a safe or on your hip)
- If the gun owner is the person at risk, seek creative solutions to reducing access if suicidal. e.g. put pictures of loved ones on the lock box

Things you might say to a person at risk

- Some people in situations like yours become suicidal. What would help you stay safe if that happened?
- Given how you are feeling, do you trust yourself to make life and death decisions?
- One way to help guarantee your gun rights is not to do anything impulsive with one.
- What helps you feel better when you are feeling bad? Who can you talk to? What activities help?
- Remember, these are temporary safety measures until you are feeling better.

Reducing Access to Medications

- Remove out of date, unused and excess medications and over the counter remedies
- At risk person should not have control of quantities of medication
- Do not get prescriptions filled for long periods of time (3 month supply). Short term prescriptions can also provide a check-in for patients

Reducing Access to Other Methods

Suffocation & Other Methods

- Difficult to remove all possible means
- Reduce access wherever possible
- Maintain visual contact with the person at risk
- Increase focus on the rest of the Safety Plan

Jason is a **16 year old** in the children's program. He's been diagnosed with ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and R/O Bipolar Disorder. After being suspended from school for fighting, he told you, his counselor, that he was "seriously thinking about ending it all" though he had no plan in mind.

When you meet with his parents, they both believe he "is just doing his manipulation thing like he does whenever he gets in trouble". Jason's father and younger brother are in the midst of hunting season and the father says, "I'll be damned if I'm going to let him ruin things for the rest of us by playing these games of his".

For more information

Means Matter website: www.meansmatter.org

Take CALM-Online—free, online course on Counseling on Access to Lethal Means <http://training.sprc.org/>

Request technical assistance from Means Matter
cbarber@hsph.harvard.edu

Request an in-person CALM training
elaine.m.frank@dartmouth.edu