

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING A SAFE HOME FOR A SUICIDAL PERSON

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Key points

Treat as serious any and all threats, ideas, plans or discussions of suicide.

Remove any likely methods of self-harm or suicide.

Be aware that if one method is removed the suicidal person may consider another method, so try to prevent access, or minimise the risk of the suicidal person having access, to a range of methods of suicide.

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IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING MEASURES:

Firearms

- Take actions to restrict or prevent access to weapons including, in particular, firearms, ramset guns, and air rifles. Where possible remove weapons from the house, farm or property. Give them to someone who lives on another property for safe storage. In emergencies, take the firearm to the local police station for storage. Ensure firearms and ammunition are locked in safe, separate storage as required by law.

Alcohol

- Remove alcohol from the house or store in minimum amounts only.

Cars, vehicles

- Prevent easy access to transport (eg, removed car keys) so that an individual's movements and access to means of self-harm are limited.

Medications and poisons

- Ensure that all medications are accounted for and that medications (including paracetamol) are locked away after they have been used. In an emergency, medications can be locked in the car boot if there is no lockable storage place in the house.
- Any prescription medications should be for a minimum amount.
- Where possible supervise the taking of medications.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet and dispose of all unused, out-of-date medications. Don't hoard old medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy for disposal.

- Ensure poisons and pesticides are locked away, as far away from the house as possible. Dispose of old poisons and pesticides. This is particularly important on farms and lifestyle properties.

Other means of suicide

- Remove cords, ropes, sharp knives (including craft knives) and any other obvious means of self-harm in the environment. Consider removing the vacuum cleaner hose and the garden hose from your house. Ask a neighbour to store them.

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In your contact and interactions with the suicidal person:

- When the risk of suicide is high, check regularly, know their whereabouts and do not leave them alone for extended periods of time. Consider taking the person with you if you go out or asking a friend or neighbour to sit with them if you have to go out and they cannot or do not want to go with you.
- Include the person in treatment planning and safety issues where possible.
- Encourage the person to talk to you about their suicidal thoughts/impulses.
- Provide safe alternatives to self-harm and expression of despair/anger/hurt etc (eg, physical activity, art and writing, self-soothing activities, contact with positive people, etc.)
- Be aware of high-risk periods for that individual (eg, a court appearance, transitions in care, counsellor absent or on holiday, anniversaries, etc), and be extra vigilant at these times.