

# CONVERSATIONS ON ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

DEVELOPED BY



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PRESENTED BY

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- Suicide is a sensitive and stressful topic- practice self-care

- You will not be asked to “treat” individuals
- Your role: recognize, respond, refer, and help in the moment

- Suicide touches many of us personally; today is about learning how to respond
  - This training is not designed to help you understand the past; its purpose is to prepare you for future situations
  - Please refrain from sharing personal experiences or graphic details
  - Please respect the privacy of others

# Goals for Today



## Prevent Suicide by:

- Recognizing when to act
- Learning what you can do to help keep friends and family safer and connect them to supportive resources and treatment if needed
- Understanding that reducing access to lethal means for those at risk is an effective prevention tool

# What CALM Conversations Is...



## What CALM Conversations IS:

### **A Training for a General Audience designed to help participants:**

Recognize when to act

Learn what you can do to help keep friends and family safer and connect them to supportive resources and treatment if needed

Understand that reducing access to lethal means for those at risk is an effective prevention tool (and how to go about it)

**CALM emphasizes *safety* REGARDLESS OF PERSONAL VIEWPOINTS!**

## What CALM Conversations IS NOT:

Is **NOT** *the* answer but should be part of all conversations regarding suicide risk.

Is not meant to prepare you to be a crisis counselor

***Neither anti-gun nor anti-medication***



# A Word on Language



Suicide and firearms are sensitive topics. Try neutral, non-judgmental language. Examples:

- There is a shift away from using the term “committed suicide” and toward using “died by suicide” because suicide is neither a crime nor a moral judgment.
- Some firearm owners see their firearms as “tools” rather than “weapons.”

# A Word on Language



Suicide and firearms are sensitive topics. Try neutral, non-judgmental language. Examples:

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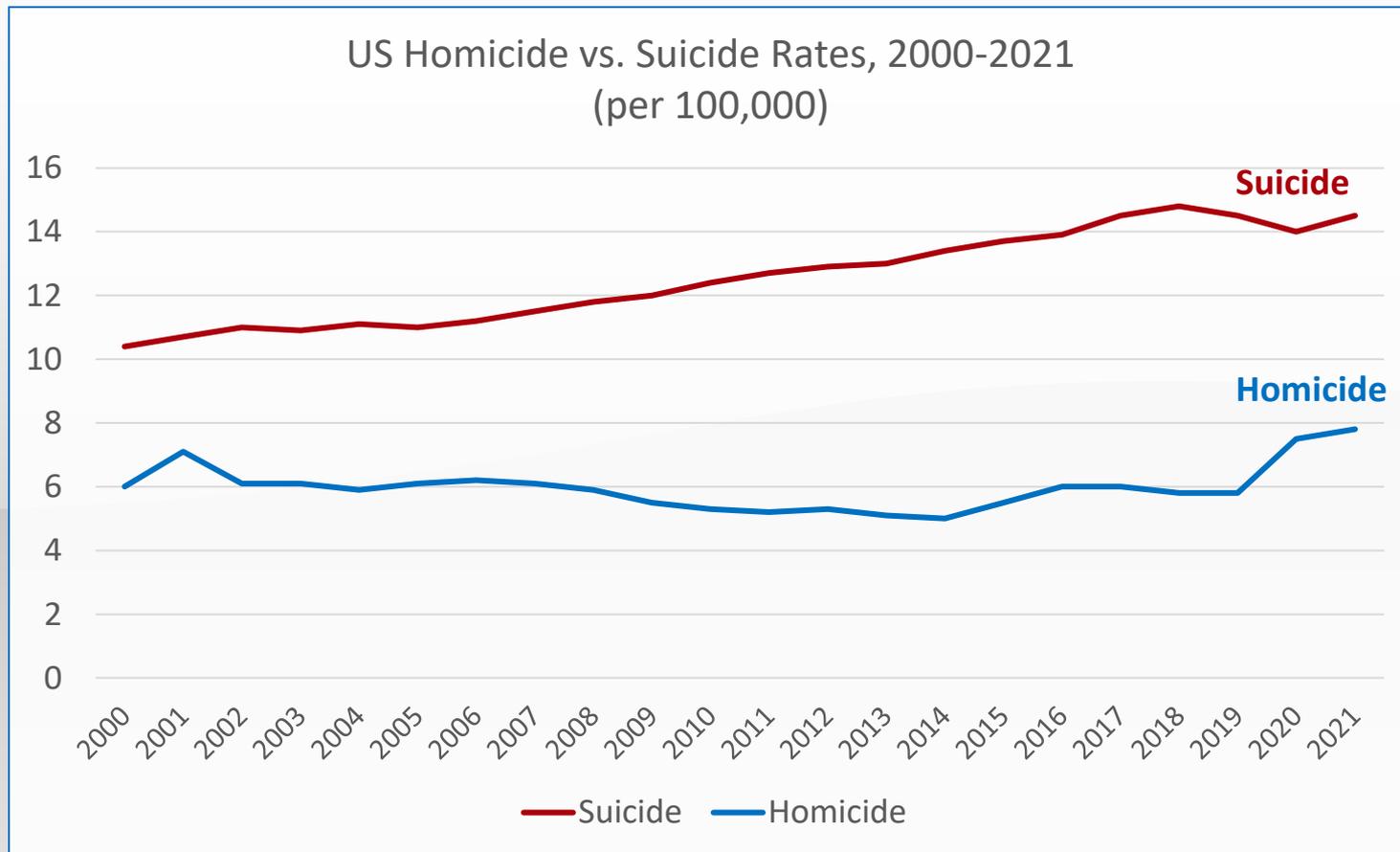
# Questions

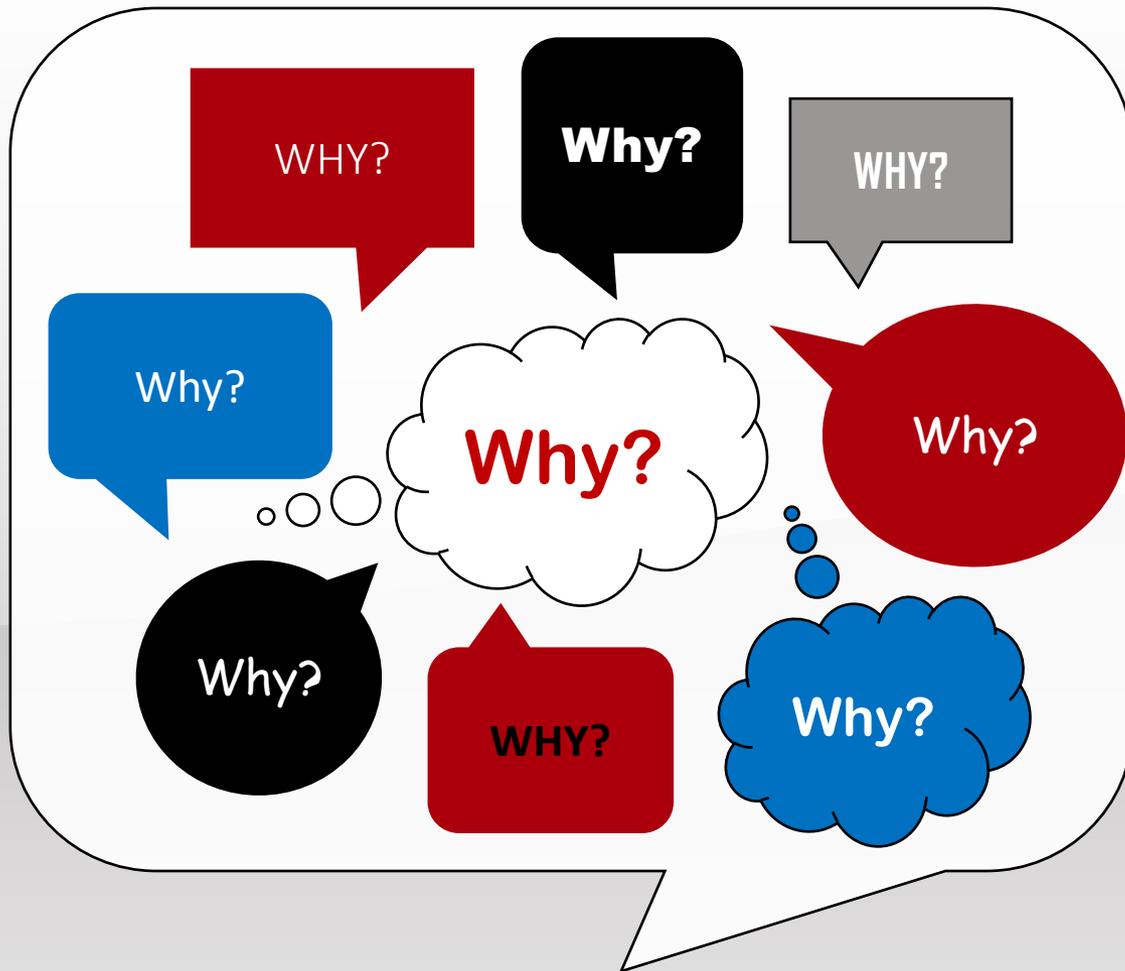
1. In the US, over the last ten years the number of suicides have

- a. decreased.
- b. stayed the same.
- c. increased.

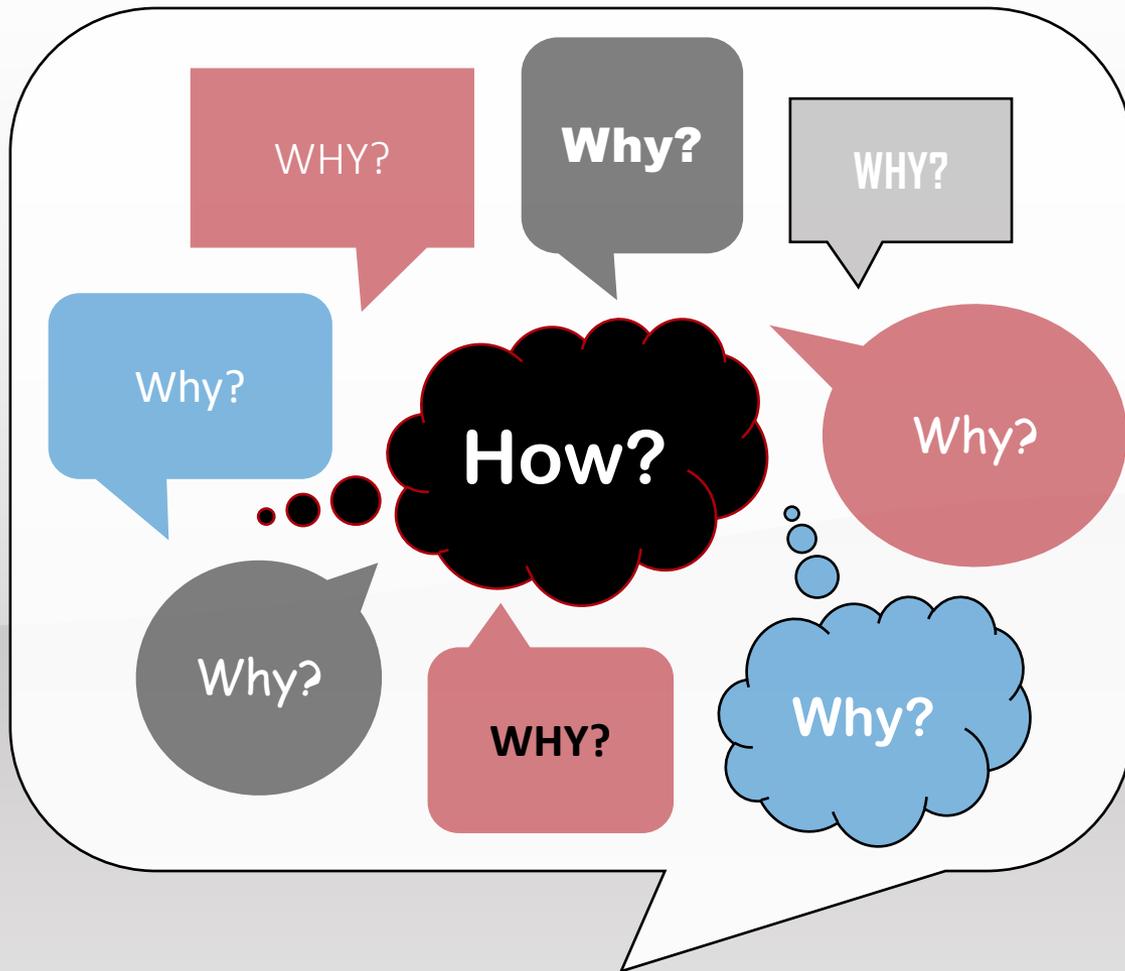
2. In the US, the number of suicides is \_\_\_\_\_ homicides.

- a. twice that of
- b. equal to
- c. less than





*Much of the focus in suicide prevention is on why a person attempts suicide. We seek to relieve the mental distress that leads to a suicide attempt.*



But **HOW** a person attempts plays a crucial role in whether they live or die. CALM covers "how to address the how" through lethal means counseling.

# Four Reasons Why Means Matter



Suicidal crises are often brief.

1

Some methods, especially guns, are far more lethal than others.

2

More than 90% of those who attempt and survive do not go on to die by suicide.

3

Most people who are suicidal are ambivalent.

4

*Putting time and distance between an at-risk individual and the most lethal means of suicide CAN save a life.*

# Pesticides and Sri Lanka

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- Sri Lanka had one of the world's highest suicide rates in mid-1990s; pesticides were the leading method.
- The most highly human-toxic pesticides were banned in the mid- to late-'90s.
- Suicide rate dropped 50% from 1996 to 2005, saving 20,000 lives.
- The drop was driven by a decline in pesticide suicides.
- Suicides by other methods did not drop. Nor did nonfatal pesticide attempts.
- The *behavior* (trying to die) didn't appear to change.
- What changed was the lethality of that behavior.



# Examples Of Effective Means Reduction



Constructing  
bridge barriers  
where suicides  
are most frequent



Moving from coal  
to natural gas in  
England



Changing  
medication  
packaging to limit  
quantity



Temporary out-of-  
home firearm  
storage

# Suicidal Crises

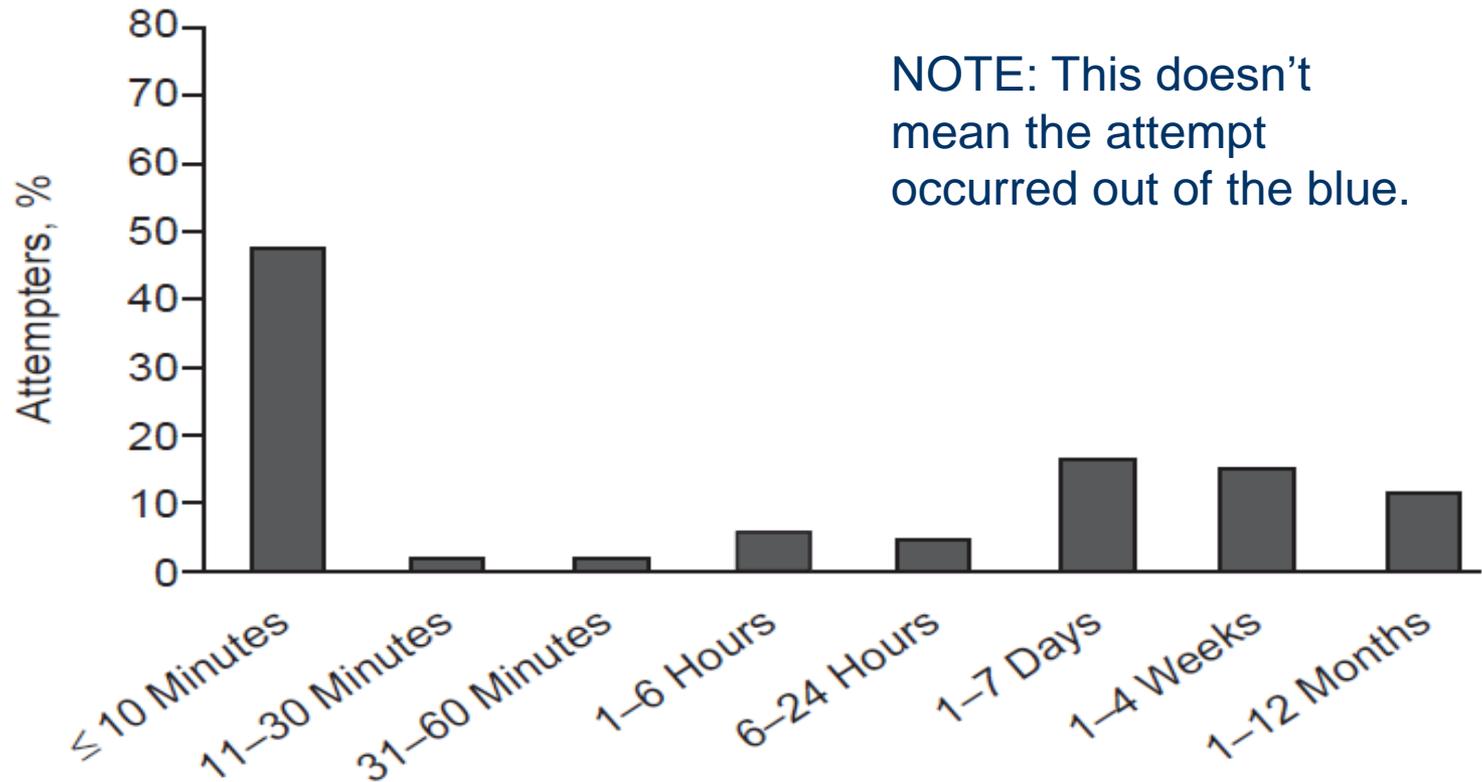
People seen in the hospital following a suicide attempt were asked when they had *first* started thinking specifically about making **that** attempt.

*Show of hands:* Close to half indicated which of the following time frame:

- a. 10 minutes or less
- b. 15 minutes to 1 hour
- c. 1 to 6 hours
- d. 6 to 24 hours
- e. 1-7 days

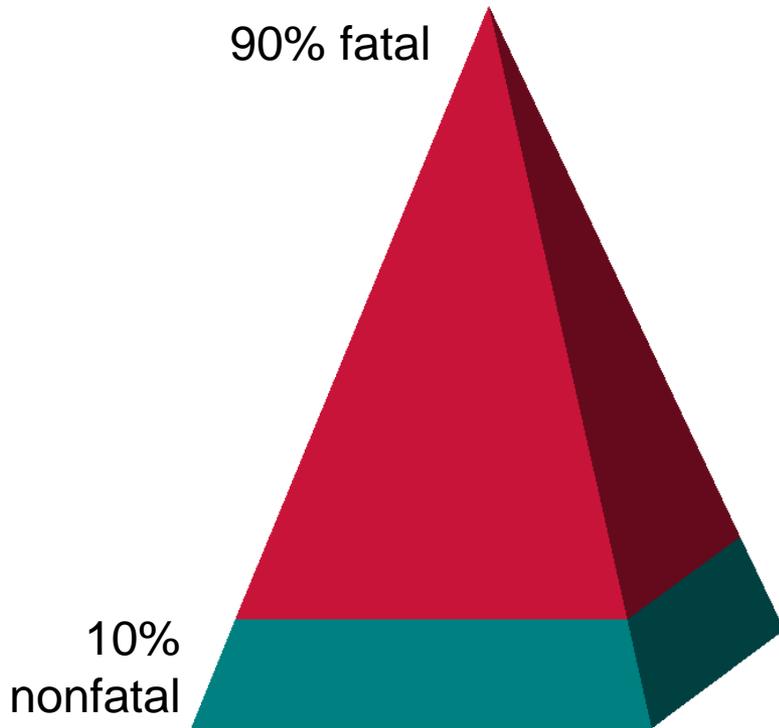
# Suicidal Crises

48% said within 10 minutes of the attempt.



# Lethality of Suicide Methods

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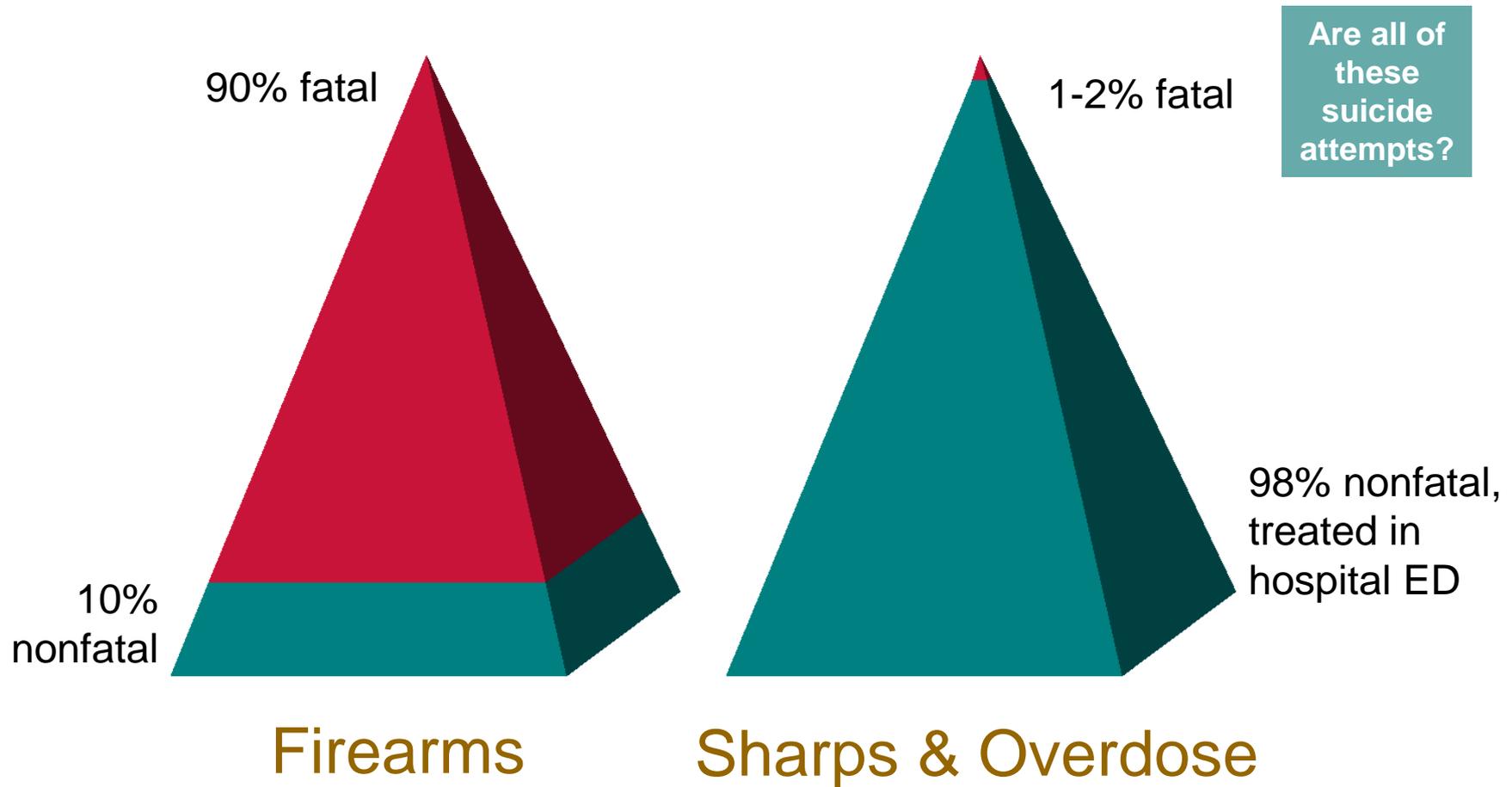
What were his odds of dying using sharps or overdose? (Both are about the same)

1-2%    10%    25%    35%

Firearms

# Lethality of Suicide Methods

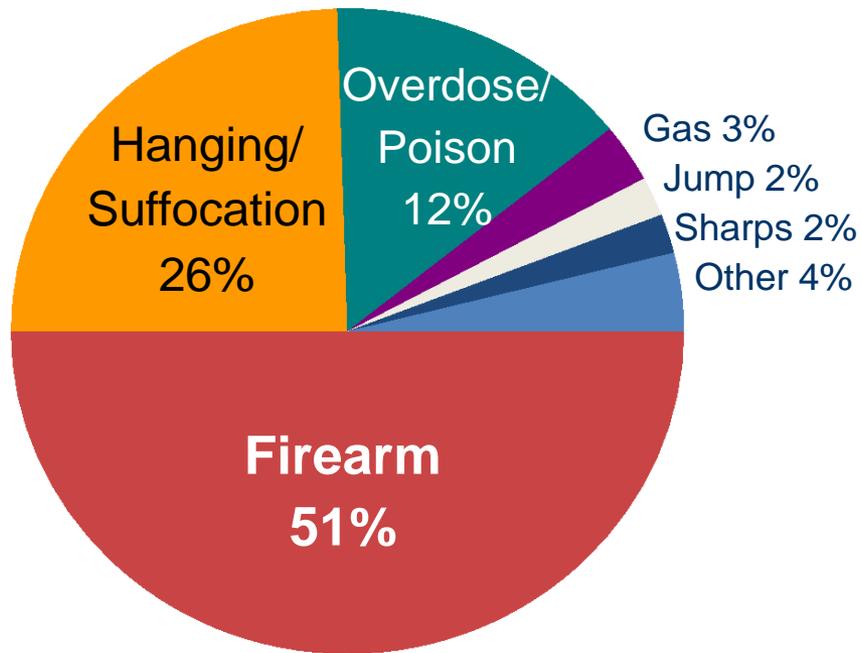
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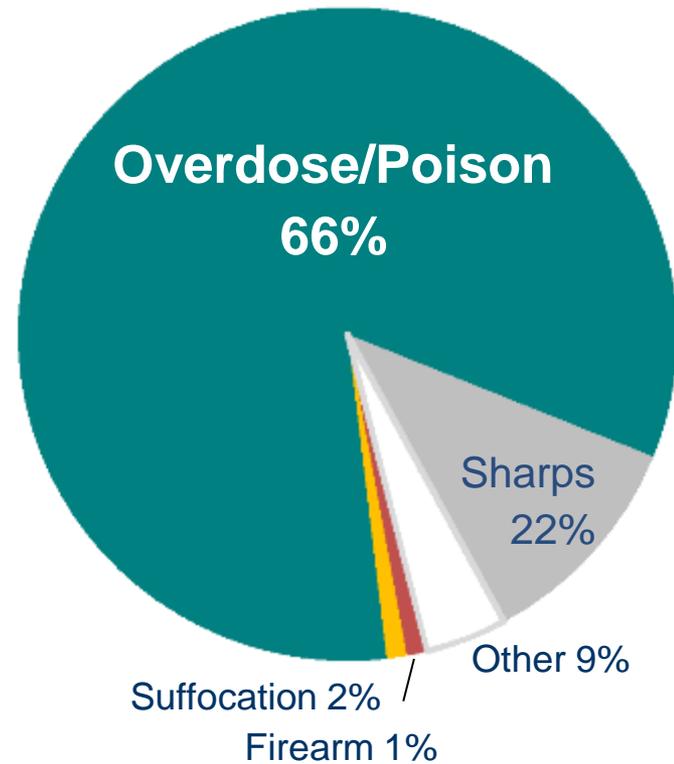
NOTE: We caution against informing your patients about the very low fatality for sharps and overdose. The perception that these methods are more lethal than they usually are may save lives.

# Suicide Methods, U.S. 2021

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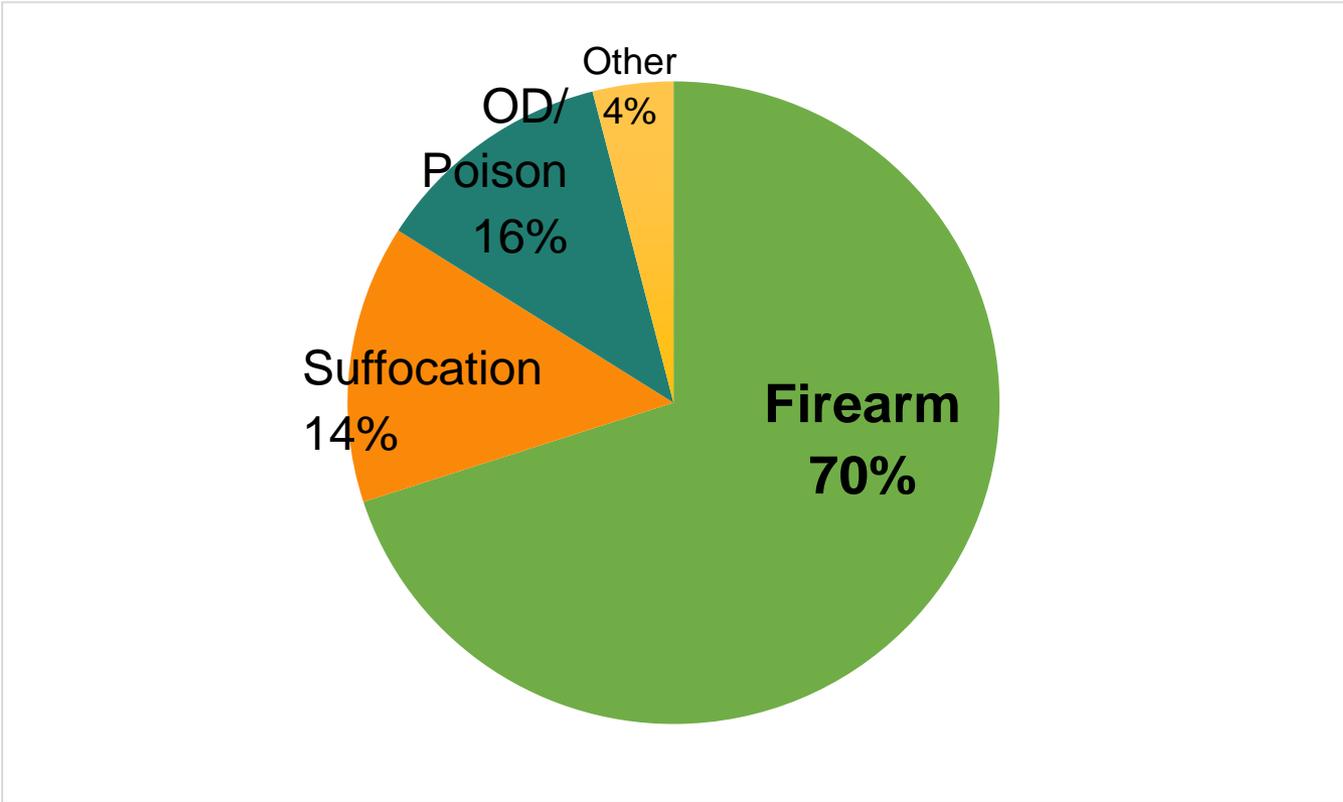
Fatal



Nonfatal

# Veteran Suicide Methods

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Sources: NVDRS, 2005-2012, 14 states

# Why Means Matter

1. The acute phase of a suicidal crisis is *often* brief.
2. Not everyone who *becomes* suicidal *remains* suicidal.
3. Suicide methods are distinctive for risk of death

- 2021: Firearm suicide rate 7.9 per 100,000- highest since detailed CDC recordkeeping began in 1968\*
  - Firearm suicides accounted for 55% of all suicides in the US
  - Highest proportion of total suicides since 1998
- Data suggests these trends may remain stable or worsen in coming years
  - 2020-2022: highest 3 years of firearm sales in US on record\*\*
  - 1 in 20 adult Americans purchased a firearm for the first time between March 2020 and March 2022\*\*\*
  - Handgun ownership associated with enduring increase in suicide death risk\*\*\*\*
  - In most cases where firearms were used in a suicide, the firearms were “household” guns.

\*CDC WONDER, 2023

\*\* NSSF, 2023

\*\*\*NORC, 2022

\*\*\*\*Studdert et al., 2020



- Conversations about suicide prevention must include conversations about safe firearm storage
  - But how do we go about this?



FYI: The following video begins with the sound of gunfire.

# So Why Means Matter



# Steps for Helping a Distressed Person



1

## Recognize warning signs

- *Changes in behavior*
- *Changes in life circumstances*

2

## Ask about mood and suicide –

- *Show compassion and care*
- *Build a connection with the person*

3

## Connect the person to support –

- *Support from professional and personal sources can help save a life*
- *Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!*

4

## Focus on increasing safety –

- *It's about safety not judgements regarding firearms, drugs or trust*
- *Focus on the (hopefully) **temporary** nature of both the suicidality and limited access to means*

**If someone's life is in immediate danger, call 911**



1

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

## **RECOGNIZE WARNING SIGNS**

- Changes in behavior
- Changes in life circumstances



CALM

# 1

## Recognizing Signs of Suicide Risk: What to Look For

***NOTE: Clear warning signs are not always present, but there are several common indicators of increased risk***

### CHANGES In Behavior

- Negative mood/emotional state
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Hopelessness
- Withdrawal from friends/family/social activities
- Sleep problems
  - Particularly persistent insomnia and/or nightmares

### Major Life CHANGES

- Illness, loss of someone close, relationship difficulties
- Legal trouble, job loss, loss of status
- Changes in residence, marital status, parental status, etc.
- Changes in substance use

### PLUS Having Easy Access To Lethal Means

- Access to firearms does not predict suicidal feelings or suicide attempt, but does predict death by suicide

***NOTE: this is not a checklist as risk is individual. Listen to your gut!***

1

# Verbal or Behavioral Signs

## What people may say...

"I can't take this anymore."

"Nobody cares what happens to me."

"People would be better off if I wasn't around."

"Nothing's going to change; I'm going to feel like this forever."

"I wish I were already dead."

## What people may do...

Appear agitated

Seem less sociable/  
more withdrawn

Have difficulty sleeping

Try to obtain means (e.g., stockpiling medications)

Exhibit changes in usual behavior.

**Trust  
Your Gut!**

# 1 What Is Helpful Or Protective



Connections to others:  
family/friends/communities



Access to support / care



Spirituality/religiousness/purpose



Mental and physical health services



Healthy coping strategies

**YOU!**

*You can help by  
showing you care,  
helping them find  
support and  
reducing access to  
lethal means*

1

## Keep in Mind:

- There is not one thing people say or do that signals suicide risk
- There is no one protective factor that guarantees safety.

***When in doubt, ask!***

Asking about suicide **does not** increase the risk of suicide.

1

## Case Study:

### ◆ CASE STUDY: MIKE



Mike is a 42-year-old third generation row crop producer and cattle farmer. He married his high school sweetheart, Barbara, and the couple has two children. Mike has maintained the same group of friends and has attended the same church since he was a kid; he is a fixture at third base on the church softball team and enjoys deer hunting with his hunting club buddies.

The past year has been tough. He has been working longer hours than usual, money is tighter due to the markets and recent weather events. He has started drinking almost every night over the past two months. He and Barbara are fighting more and, according to her, he is having trouble controlling his anger.

- *Is there anything Helpful?*
- *Are there Warning Signs?*



# 2

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

## **ASK ABOUT MOOD & SUICIDE**

- Show compassion and care
- Build a connection with the person

## 2

# Ask about Suicide

- ✓ Show compassion and care
- ✓ Build a connection with the person
- ✓ Express your concern for their well-being, and be specific:

*“Because of X, Y, Z, I’m worried about you. What’s been going on?”*

- ✓ Ask as directly as possible

*“Are you thinking about suicide?”*

*Remember Mike? Let’s practice asking him.*

*“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”*

## 2

# Asking the Question #1

How do we respond to “Yes”?

- ✓ Express appreciation for being open to talking
- ✓ Emphasize safety
- ✓ Offer self as a resource

*“Thanks for letting me know how bad things have been lately - it sounds really tough. I want to help- can we talk about some things that might be helpful?”*

*“I’m worried about you and want to see you get through this difficult time. Can we figure out a plan to help things get better?”*

*\*You do not need to have the perfect response- just shift to connecting the person with help and keeping them safe!*

## 2

# Asking the Question #2

How do we respond to “No”?

- ✓ Express appreciation for being open to talking
- ✓ Emphasize safety
- ✓ Offer self as a resource

*“Ok, but if you ever were, I want you to know I care about you & want you to be safe.”*

*“That’s good to hear, but I’m still worried about you. What’s been going on?”*

*\*Even if nothing is going on, you can have the CALM Conversation to make the home safer for everyone .*



# 3

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

## **CONNECT THE PERSON TO SUPPORT**

- Support from professional and personal sources can help save a life
- Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!

## 3

## Mike &amp; Barbara

## ◆ CASE STUDY: MIKE

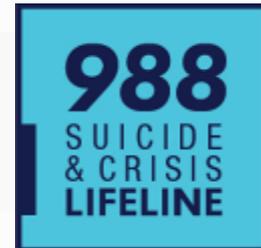
One night at 3am, after an argument, Barbara woke up and Mike wasn't in bed. She went downstairs and found him sitting in the dark with his rifle on the table. When she asked him if he was okay, he yelled, "Leave me alone. Just let me have some peace and quiet."

-How is Barbara feeling? What do you think she might do next?

Scared, she called Mike's dad. Hearing the fear in her voice, he said he would come right over.

# 3 Options for Additional Support

- Don't worry alone; enlist the help of others!
- Informal sources of support
  - Increasing visits with friends and family to reduce isolation
  - Identifying a "go-to" person
  - Creating a list of stress-reducing activities/distractions for difficult times
- Formal sources of support:
  - Counseling, medication, spiritual support
    - Good to have local resources handy
  - Call a suicide crisis line



Now available in: CO, CT, MO, MT, OR, PA, TX, VA, WA, and WY!



# 3

## Having the Conversation about Support

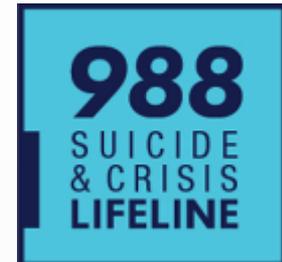
- Any additional support you can get them might help to save a life!
- Try to connect the person to appropriate services:  
“I know that it can be tough to ask for help, but I’d like to help connect you with some support. I know about some resources around here. What do you think?”
- Regardless of their response, try to strengthen connections to existing support  
“I’d like to see you get help, but I understand if you aren’t ready to take that step. What about hanging out with friends and family more often?”

## 3

# Local Resources

This could be a list of:

- Community Mental Health Providers
- Regional and National help lines
- Telehealth providers
- Apps or web pages offering support



## Agricultural Suicide Crisis/Resource Line



Now available in: CO, CT, MO, MT, OR, PA, TX, VA, WA, and WY!





# 4

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

## **FOCUS ON INCREASING SAFETY OF FIREARM & MEDICATION STORAGE**

- It's about safety, not judgements regarding firearms, drugs or trust
- Focus on the (hopefully) temporary nature of both the suicidality and limited access to means

## 4 Mike and His Dad Discuss Safety

### ◆ CASE STUDY: MIKE

Mike's dad is aware of Mike's recent struggles. He discusses various sources of help and support with Mike. He also asks Mike about ways that they can store the firearms and medications to keep Mike and Barbara safer until things turn around...

# 4

## Reducing Access To Lethal Means May Save A Life

- Begin with concern and empathy – I care about you and want to help you through this
- Focus on increasing safety – not judgements regarding firearms, drugs or trust
- Focus on the (hopefully) temporary nature of both the suicidality and changes in storage practices
- Familiarity with firearms or medications may increase rather than decrease risk –people use what they know
- Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!

# 4

## Talk about Access to Lethal Means

### **Express concern for their safety**

- *“There’s one more important thing I want to talk about- how can we keep you safe while you’re feeling this way?”*

### **Explore access to lethal means – guns and meds**

- *“Sometimes when people are feeling like this, strong feelings can come on fast. So, it is important that we take steps to keep you safe- especially around guns and medications.”*

### **Time & distance can REDUCE risk of death**

- *“What can we do to help make you safer?”*
- *“Can we talk about ways to safely store the guns and medications until things get better?”*

# 4

## Ask for and Encourage Safety:

### **Explore Home Safety**

- “What are some storage options to keep you safe until things get better?”

### **Explore concerns about reducing access**

- “What do we need to do to carry out this plan?”

### **Agree on a plan**

- “So, we agree, that in order to keep you safe, we need to.....”

## 4

## Continuum of Safer Storage:

## Off-site Storage

- Friends or relatives
- Gun range
- Self storage facilities
- Pawn shops

## In-home Safe Storage

- Store firearms locked, unloaded in a safe or lockbox
- Trigger or cable locks for added time
- Secure locking device (keys, combination) with a trusted person

## Other Options

- Remove an essential component to make the gun inoperable

*What have you done in the past – photos, magnet for 988, freeze keys, etc.  
Know your states legal position on firearm transfer*

## 4 Self Defense Firearms & Safe Storage:

# Self-Defense Firearms and Safe Storage



# 4

## Addressing the Self-Defense Gun

Self-defense firearms require a thoughtful balance between quick and **controlled** access

**If the person at risk is **not** the gun owner:**

- Keep self-defense gun on your person or locked up
- Consider storing self- or home-defense firearm in a biometric or quick-release personal safe and locking up all others

**If the person at risk **is** the gun owner:**

- Have a family member or friend temporarily take control of access (e.g., personal safe)
- Consider other self-defense or creative solutions (e.g., alarms, tasers, batons, high intensity lights, etc.)
- Create emotional distance (e.g., photos on the lock box, code with a loved one's birthday)

*The solution will not be perfect but remember: any time and distance created between the person at risk and firearms can increase safety.*

## 4

## Practice

- **Imagine that you are Mike's Dad. You suggest that he store his guns outside the home, and he is not open to that idea at all. "There is no way in hell those guns are leaving this house!," he says.**
  - **What are some ways that you can respond?**



# 4

## What if the Person is Resistant?

### DO

- Emphasize safety- “I just want to see you stay safe.”
- Emphasize choice- “If that doesn’t work, what steps would you consider?”
- Emphasize temporariness- “Would you consider this just until things get better?”

### DO NOT

- Make it an argument- “You have to do this!”
- Make it a trust issue- “You aren’t capable of having a gun right now!”
- Escalate or threaten- “Give them up or else!”

*“I understand that the guns are valuable and important to you, and it’s your choice. But I’m still worried about you. Are there other steps that you would consider to keep you safe?”*



# 4

## Securing Medications

- In addition to Mike and his dad talking about ways to safely secure the guns, Barbara worked on making sure that dangerous medications were stored safely.
- ***What steps could she take to ensure that Mike stayed safe?***

## 4

## Securing Medications

To help keep Mike safe, Barbara:

- ... cleaned out the medicine cabinet and dropped off all of their old and unused medications at a pharmacy that offered free disposal services.
- ... purchased a cash box from an office supply store to lock up their prescription medications as well as their over-the-counter sleep aids and pain medications, leaving just enough out for the next few days.
- ...set a reminder in her phone to replenish the supply every few days.
- ***She took these steps even though Mike never mentioned medication as a possible method of suicide.***

# 4

## Securing Medications

- Medications are the most common method of suicide attempt. While overdose attempts are less likely to be fatal, they are the third leading method of suicide death
- Therefore, it is recommended that access to medications be limited to only what is immediately needed when a person is showing warning signs

# 4

## Secure Access to Medications

- **Safe disposal** of out of date, unused and excess medications and over the counter remedies.
- **Reduce available quantities** of prescription and over the counter meds, especially those for pain and other meds of abuse.
  - Have only what is needed in the short-term on hand
- Use a **lock box to secure lethal and additional medications**
- Ask a **pharmacist or Poison Center** to determine “safe” levels
- If opioid use/abuse is a problem, obtain NARCAN and learn how to use it along with other lifesaving methods
- Think about any substance use that can impair judgement such as alcohol

# 4

## Other Considerations

- It is difficult to reduce access to everything that could be used
- If a method is specified, take steps to remove it, limit or disable it, for example: car keys
- Focus on other ways of increasing safety – maintaining contact, follow up on plan for safety, accessing support

**Reducing access to lethal means is  
only PART of suicide prevention**

# Summary



You don't need to be a superhero to act. Just remember that a few simple steps can save a life:

1

## Recognize warning signs

- *Changes in behavior*
- *Changes in life circumstances*

2

## Ask about mood and suicide –

- *Show compassion and care*
- *Build a connection with the person*

3

## Connect the person to support –

- *Support from professional and personal sources can help save a life*
- *Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!*

4

## Focus on increasing safety –

- *It's about safety not judgements regarding firearms, drugs or trust*
- *Focus on the (hopefully) **temporary** nature of both the suicidality and limited access to means*

Finally, remember that you do not need to do this “perfectly” - don't let fear of making a mistake prevent you from acting!

# Mike's Dad Video Clip



This video is [used](#) with permission from Worried About a Veteran`

# National Resources



- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**  
[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- **Means Matter, Harvard Injury Control Research Center**  
<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

# Need help 24/7 ?

**AgriStress**  
**HELPLINE** <sup>SM</sup>

 **833.897.2474**  
*call or text*

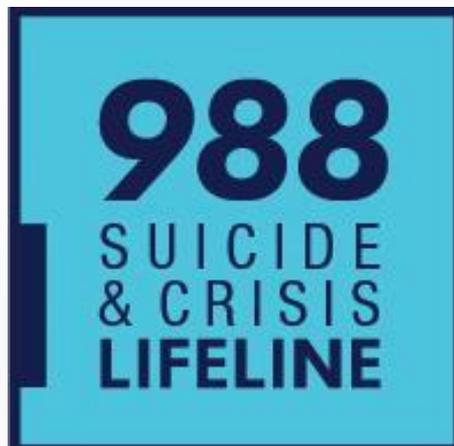


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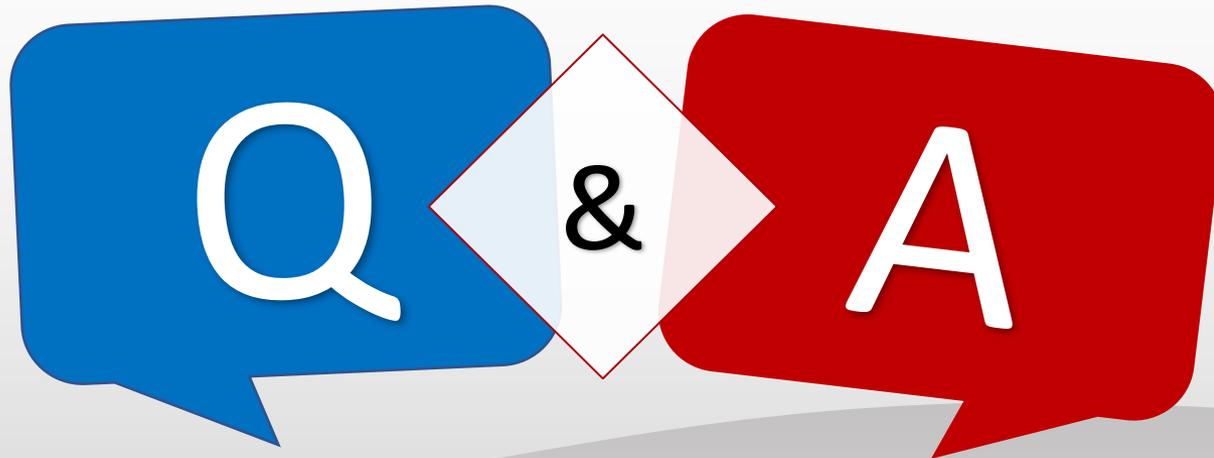
For more information, scan this QR code ---->  
or visit: [agrisafe.org/agristress-helpline](https://agrisafe.org/agristress-helpline).



Need help 24/7 ?



# Questions?



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