

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING A SAFE HOME ENVIRONMENT FOR THE SUICIDAL YOUNG PERSON

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.

In the home environment consider the following measures

Firearms

- Take actions to restrict or prevent access to weapons including, in particular, firearms, ramset guns, 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.
- Firearms and ammunition are required by law to be locked in safe, separate storage. Ensure that, apart from the licensed gun owner, as few people as possible know where the keys to the gun cabinet and the ammunition storage cabinet are kept. This is especially important on farms where firearms may be used frequently - ensure they are IMMEDIATELY LOCKED away after use. Vary the hiding places for the keys.
- If the licensed firearm owner is the person at risk of suicide, remove firearms, cabinet storage keys and ammunition from the property. Try to do this in discussion with the suicidal person but be aware that you may have to act without their consent.

Alcohol

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

Cars, vehicles

- Prevent easy access to transport (i.e. car keys) so that an individual's movements and access to means of self-harm are limited.
- If you are concerned about the young person gassing themselves with carbon monoxide from the car exhaust, remove vacuum cleaner hoses from the property. Be alert to a young person buying a hose for no good reason.

Medications and poisons

- Ensure that all medications are accounted for and that medications (including Panadol) 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 medication should be for a minimum amount.
- Where possible supervise the taking of medication.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet regularly and dispose of all unused, out of date medications.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 from garden sheds and garages. 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.

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 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.
- Be aware of high-risk periods for that individual - a court appearance, transitions in care, counsellor absent or on holiday, anniversaries, etc - and be extra vigilant at these times.
- Be aware of what the young person is accessing on the computer. There are many websites which provide information about methods of suicide and there are individuals who monitor websites and incite or encourage depressed or suicidal individuals to imitate behaviours.
- Monitor what a young person is reading and writing on social networking sites, blogging etc.
- Provide safe alternatives to self-harm and expression of despair/anger/hurt such as physical activity, art and writing, relaxing activities, contact with positive people.

A detailed individualised safety plan should be developed for the young person in consultation with appropriate professionals (such as mental health, GSE, and School Guidance Counsellors). Such a plan may include; phone numbers of key involved agencies and support people, identification of risk factors or signs of distress for the young person and prompts around management of these.

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References

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2. American Psychiatric Association (2003). *Practice guideline for the assessment and treatment of patients with suicidal behaviours*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Press.
3. Hawton, Keith. (2005). Restriction of access to methods of suicide as a means of suicide prevention. In Keith Hawton (Ed). *Prevention and treatment of suicidal behaviour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.