

Parent Caregiver Safety Materials



Helping Your Child Stay Safe

Parents and caregivers play a powerful role in a child’s physical and emotional wellbeing, especially when a young person is struggling with self-harm, suicidal thoughts, or thoughts of harming others. This guide organizes key information into clear sections to help you support your child and maintain a safer home environment.

Need Immediate Help?

- **Call 911** if you cannot ensure your child’s immediate physical safety.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text **988** for free, confidential support at any time.

What to Look For

Recognizing early signs of distress allows you to offer support before a situation becomes more serious. Trust your instincts. If your child seems “off,” withdrawn, or unusually upset, check in.

Possible warning signs include:

- Unexplained injuries or attempts to hide sharp objects.
- Talking, writing, or posting about death or wanting to disappear.
- Intense anger, irritability, or sudden mood changes.
- Withdrawing from family or friends.
- Fascination with weapons, violence, or disturbing online content.

Responding with Care

When a child shares painful feelings or behaviors, your calm, supportive presence can make an enormous difference. This section focuses on relationship-based responses that help your child feel heard and safe.

Ways to respond compassionately:

- Stay calm. Your tone communicates safety.
- Listen without judgment.
- Validate feelings: *“Thank you for telling me. I know this is really hard.”*
- Ask open-ended questions: *“Can you tell me what’s been going on?”*
- Avoid punishment. Instead, focus on safety, connection, and support.

Creating a Safer Home

Limiting access to dangerous items is an important way to reduce the risk of impulsive behavior during a crisis. Medications and firearms should always be kept locked. Doublecheck that the following items are stored safely:

- **Medicines & Household Substances** - Lock up all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, cleaning supplies, toxic products, alcohol, cannabis items, and inhalants.
- **Firearms & Related Items** - Store firearms *locked, unloaded, and out of reach*, with ammunition locked separately. Secure all accessories, keys, combinations, and lockboxes. See [Lock and Talk Virginia](#) for information on free firearms and medication locks.
- **Sharp Items** -Secure knives, scissors, razors, grooming tools, and small pointed objects like pins or broken glass.
- **Strangulation Risks** - Store items such as belts, ropes, cords, plastic bags, and anything that can hold weight or hang loosely.

- **Other Hazards** - Store tools, lighters or matches, small appliances with long cords, and heavy objects safely.

Daily Safety Practices

- Use lockboxes, safes, or locked cabinets.
- Remove unnecessary sharp items or strangulation hazards from bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Supervise the use of sharp or risky tools.
- Choose safer alternatives (e.g., electric razors, precut foods, safety scissors, cordless blinds).
- Check periodically for hidden items.
- Monitor online activity, social media, and messages for concerning themes.
- Increase supervision during times of crisis or stress.

Building Your Support Team

You don't have to navigate your child's distress alone. A strong support network helps your child feel held, understood, and surrounded by care.

Helpful members of your team may include:

- Your child's school counselor.
- A pediatrician or primary care provider.
- A therapist, counselor, or psychiatrist.
- Local mental health providers or crisis services.

Reaching out early, before a situation escalates, can make a meaningful, potentially lifesaving difference.

For more information on keeping your child safe and responding to difficult situations:

- [Safety Action Steps: Tools and Strategies for Keeping Your Child Safe](#)
- [Recognizing and Responding to Signs of: Self-Harm, Suicide Risk, Signs of Violence](#)
- [Guides for Limiting Access to: Firearms, Medications & Substances, Ligatures, Knives and Sharp Objects](#)
- [Understanding Gun Safety](#)
- [Help for Cutting and Other Self-Injury](#)
- [What to Do if You're Worried About Suicide](#)

VA Law Requirements

Understanding Virginia's secure storage laws helps families meet safety expectations and prevent access to firearms by children or teens.

Virginia Secure Storage Requirements ([§18.2-56.2](#), [§22.1-272.1](#), [§22.1-79.4](#))

Virginia law requires firearms in homes with minors to be stored securely (locked, unloaded, and inaccessible). Adults can face legal consequences if a child gains access to an unsecured firearm. Gun sellers must also display secure storage reminders and lost or stolen firearms from vehicles must be reported to law enforcement, with increased penalties if the firearm is later accessed by someone else. These laws are in place to prevent harm and promote safer communities.

What This Means for Families

If you own a firearm:

- It must always be locked, unloaded, and inaccessible to children.
- Ammunition must be locked and stored separately.
- Use a gun safe, lockbox, trigger lock, or cable lock.
- Never leave a firearm in an unlocked vehicle.