

# PERSONAL SAFETY PLAN



Suicide by firearm makes up 60% of all firearms-related deaths. When we do our part as a community to reduce these deaths, we are making a positive difference to save lives. At the same time, we are also helping to protect rights because we are reducing 60% of the “reasoning” behind infringing legislation.

Understanding the issues concerning suicide and mental health is an important way to take part in suicide prevention, help others in crisis, change the conversation around suicide, and safeguard the dignity and rights of all people.

Suicide, like other human behaviors, has no single determining cause. Instead, suicide occurs as a result of many biological, psychological, interpersonal, environmental, and societal influences that interact with one another, often over time.

But the good news is that suicide can be prevented! Evidence shows that referring to support services, talking about suicide, reducing access to means of self-harm, and following up with loved ones are just some of the actions we can all take to help ourselves and others.

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In Partnership with



[HoldMyGuns.org](https://HoldMyGuns.org)



## SUICIDE PREVENTION

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), just as suicide is not caused by a single factor, research suggests that reductions in suicide will not be prevented by any single strategy or approach. Rather, suicide prevention is best achieved by a focus across the individual, relationship, family, community, and societal levels and across all sectors, private and public.

Protective factors, or those influences that buffer against the risk for suicide, can also be found across the different levels of the social ecological model. The firearms community is itself a protective factor! We look out for one another. We spend time learning and laughing on the range together. We are connected through our shared values and interests. We help each other be our best selves.

A Girl & A Gun (AG & AG) is not a licensed medical or mental health provider; however, it is a caring and supportive community that encourages and expects people to be safe around firearms.

The AFSP says that creating environments that address risk and protective factors where individuals live, work, and play can help prevent suicide.



Having honest and sincere discussions about suicide can change a community's culture and societal norms, encourage help-seeking, and demonstrate that good health and mental health are valued, while risk factors for suicide are not. Similarly, making changes to an individual's physical environment to prevent harmful behavior, such as encouraging one to voluntarily limit access to lethal means, can reduce suicide rates, particularly in times of crisis or transition.

AG & AG is proud to be a part of an initiative to reduce suicide by firearm. Together with our partner, Hold My Guns, our strategy is to take action on two societal levels:

**1. Community.** AG & AG is offering QPR Institute Gatekeeper Training, which educates instructors,

range safety officers, gun shop employees, and others on the warning signs for suicide and equips them to respond. QPR is Question, Persuade, and Refer, an evidence-based process that empowers a Gatekeeper to assess suicide warning signs and refer the individual in crisis to appropriate resources. QPR is not a form of counseling or mental health treatment.

**2. Individual.** AG & AG is offering a Personal Safety Plan worksheet to help members proactively address life's ups and downs. By creating a customized, voluntary plan, individuals are equipped with strategies that bring comfort and utilize appropriate resources. Listing one's personal preferences and actionable steps for an individual and close family or friends to follow, including access to lethal means, helps to promote safety and safeguard individual rights.



## CREATING A PLAN



For individuals with depression, whether it has been diagnosed by a healthcare provider or not, there is a very real risk that thoughts of suicide may arise. While the emotional pain that has triggered these thoughts may feel overwhelming, it does not mean that an individual will lose control or act on those thoughts. In fact, having a personal safety plan in place is one method that can help someone cope with bad feelings until circumstances change.

### Benefits of a Plan

Dr. Barbara Stanley, one of the first to introduce the concept of safety planning for suicide prevention, states that suicidal urges are known to ebb and flow. Equipping an individual with a plan to stave off suicidal feelings can help the urge to dissipate.

Additionally, Dr. Craig J. Bryan and his colleagues in psychiatry have documented evidence that those who made and used safety plans were more likely to recall behavioral coping strategies and less likely to be hospitalized.

### Privacy and Control

A personal safety plan provides written instructions that an individual creates as a contingency plan if one is in a dark place or unforeseen circumstance. To ensure a safe environment, the plan communicates the needs and wishes of an individual, including preferred options for lethal means storage. It provides steps to follow until the individual is safe again. This plan is simply a guide; it can be customized.

It is a *personal* safety plan because it

is primarily meant for personal use. The plan does not have to be shared with anyone, although it may be shared in sections, if the individual chooses, with relevant members of the support team. For example, it may be appropriate to share the Seek Comfort section with a responsible teenager, who knows to get the heating pad if one is trapped in physical pain, but the Lethal Means section may be one that is only shared with a spouse. Each individual must assess her or his own risk for what to share of the personal plan and with whom.

### Legal Considerations

First and foremost, ignorance of the law is no excuse. Many states have different requirements and restrictions, so each individual must be familiar with local, state, and county laws regarding “red flag”



## CREATING A PLAN

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provisions; firearm storage, transportation, and safekeeping requirements; and other related laws. Note that third-party interpretations can often be out of date and/or incorrect. One could contact an attorney specializing in self-defense/firearms law. The best action is for an individual to search the State's website for "Firearm Laws" and read the rules.

A personal safety plan acknowledges that an individual may someday experience thoughts of self-harm; however, it also clearly demonstrates the person's preparation and willingness to ensure a safe environment. Voluntary measures are generally seen as positive indicators that safeguard an individual's rights. Conversely, if someone chooses not to seek help voluntarily, ignores obvious warning signs, and is unable to make decisions on one's own behalf, it opens the door to outside involuntary intervention. For example, allowing a situation to escalate to the point of involuntary commitment to a mental health institution or drug rehabilitation center can put an individual's right to bear arms at risk, per ATF Form 4473, Section 21.F. Each individual must assess her or his own risk with regard to a personal plan.



### Creating/Enacting Your Plan

If you or someone you love are currently struggling with thoughts of suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

The ideal time to draft a personal safety plan is before a time of crisis. Life is full of unexpected circumstances, but the effects of those situations can be lessened when there is a pre-determined response.

Try to create the plan while you are feeling well and can think clearly, rather than waiting until you are having thoughts of self-harm. Customize the plan to fit your needs and wishes, and keep it where you can easily find it should the need arise.

You may choose to work together with someone you trust, such as your spouse, best friend, or close family member, to talk through your safety plan. If necessary, contact an FFL in the Hold My Guns network to make arrangements to receive your firearms. Discuss with each person the role she

or he will have if you call when enacting your plan. If you prefer a healthcare professional who respects patient privacy and the right to keep and bear arms, find a provider at 2Adoc.com.

If you experience any of the warning signs of mental distress listed in your personal safety plan, proceed through the steps in your plan until you are safe.

If you, on your own or with your support team, accept responsibility for restoring access to lethal means, make arrangements to receive your FFL items or nonserialized critical parts of your firearms in compliance with any personal agreements, as well as state and local laws pertaining to the transfer or consignment return of firearms.

If you are unable to execute your plan in a controlled manner or have strong feelings of self-harm, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or 911.

## CREATING A PLAN

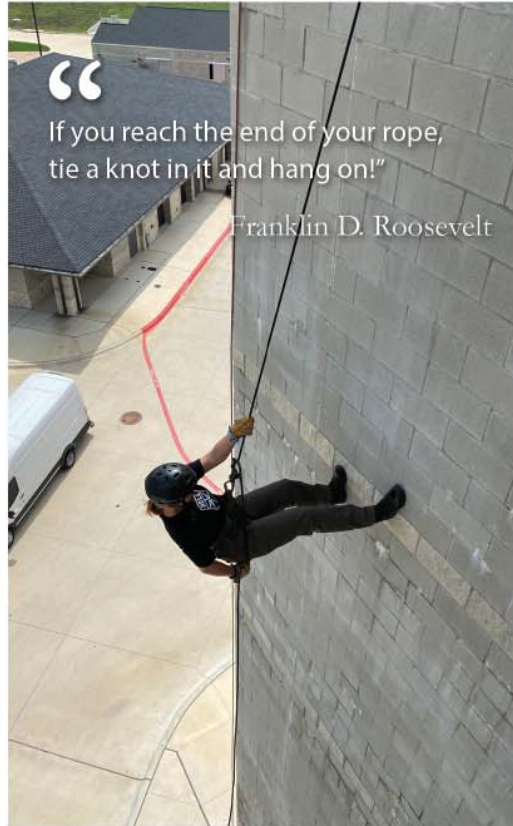
### Sections of the Plan

*Contact Information.* Current contact information for the owner of the safety plan. Have it written out; do not rely on a digital address book that you may not have access to in extenuating circumstances.

*Emergency Contact.* This individual should be aware they are included on the safety plan, and ideally should be given a copy of the plan to help advocate for the individual.

*Indicators I may need to refer to my safety plan.* Take a moment to pause and reflect on some of the ways you or someone close to you might be clued in that you're not feeling like yourself. Sometimes when people feel stressed, they don't realize the effects of that stress until things start to go sideways. By taking a moment to think about these indicators when you are not feeling stressed, it will help you tune in and ensure your needs are being met.

*Understanding why I feel this way.* In this section, identify the underlying stressors if possible. "I notice I have digestive problems when I have to take my children to my ex's house for the weekend." "The pain of PMS for me reminds me of my miscarriage and it makes me feel sad." "Around the dates that



my loved passed away, I notice that I tend to struggle to cope with grief." Specifically identifying the catalyst of your emotions/actions can help you and others know why you are engaged in certain behaviors and how best to help in a way that is thoughtful of the root causes of your indicators.

*When there are warning signs, here are ways I would like to.* This is a section for you to write out the self-care and comfort measures that are most helpful to you. List your favorite foods to help you choose nourishment. Write out the ways you want to be touched -- or left alone. You can always say, "Please ask me first if I'd like a hug." In this section, there is an

area to fill in ideas for a change of mind or scenery -- grounding phrases that you want to be reminded of when you feel stressed, or a reminder that a warm bubble bath always makes you feel better. Lastly, list steps that you will take to confront the situation. For example, "Instead of letting my mind spin, I will write out a list of pros and cons to help me make an informed decision." "I will share my concerns with my spouse and ask for input on finding a balance between grace and personal expectations toward change so that my goals are reasonable and attainable." I would like my friend [insert name] hold me accountable in the following ways:"

*Help me gently refocus in these ways.* List things that you would like for people to say, do, or suggest that help you to gently refocus on positive things that are important (such as remind you of a favorite verse, quote, song, affirmation of values, etc.). Friends and family love you, but they cannot read your mind! Letting them know ahead of time what uplifts you the most can give them the tools to comfort you more efficiently. Similarly to a birth plan, where an expectant mother lets her team know what gives her the

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## CREATING A PLAN

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most comfort and strength, consider writing things like, “Please put on quiet music such as \_\_\_\_.” “Ask me if you can pray for me.” “I feel relaxed when you hold my hand.” “Looking at photos of our children gives me strength.”

Write contact information for friends that you will want to call/visit when you need support. Let these individuals know that they are included in your personal plan. Ask them to consider adding you to their preferred contacts on their mobile device so that you can reach them if needed. If you are using this plan and you can’t reach the first person, leave a message and go to the next. Having more than one contact written out is helpful! Also, writing out their phone number is important in case you do not have access to your digital address book.

*Lethal Means.* List steps that you will take to keep yourself safe by temporarily and voluntarily reducing access to and/or responsibly storing items of lethal means. For example, “If I am tempted to self-harm, I will ask [name] to help me place my knives and razor blades in a locked box, and he’ll keep the key for a few days until my feelings of self-harm pass.”



“With the accountability of my spouse, I will portion out my medication to a box with a timer, so I will only have access to my prescribed dose.” “I will make an appointment with [local gun shop] to store my firearms for two weeks before the anniversary of my loved one’s passing.” “I will ask [name] to remove the firing pin from [firearm] and store it at [location] for [timeframe].”

*Additional Contacts.* Knowing your preferred medical, mental health, and spiritual team and how to contact them can help you immediately find the care you need. If you do not have a professional contact to add to the spaces in this section, make it a point to search for one before you are in a crisis. Ensure you’re added to their practice and fill out any referral

forms or required new patient documents, as well as any documents that would allow you to send them medical records for evaluation or to allow to you call them after hours if needed. Many practitioners allow patients or clients to meet for a Q&A to see if their care would be appropriate for your situation. Yes, emergency personnel are life-saving, but the more you can utilize your preferred resources, the more congruency of care you will have in a crisis situation and follow-up.

Another additional contact to add might be housing or legal resources, such as a place of shelter or an attorney.

*24/7 Help.* The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255 and is always a valuable, available resource. In an emergency, call 911.

## SAFETY PLAN WORKSHEET

MY FULL NAME:	BIRTHDATE:
PHONE NUMBER:	ALTERNATE PHONE NUMBER:
EMAIL ADDRESS:	ADDRESS OF RESIDENCE:
<p>Thank you for caring about me. While I do understand that unforeseen circumstances may arise, I ask that you clearly define the cause for concern (for example, "I noticed you are skipping meals"), help me identify through asking questions why I may be feeling that way (for example, "what's feeling heavy right now?") and make suggestions for what may help based on my Plan. I value the opportunity to have agency in my personal wellness, and to make informed decisions.</p>	
EMERGENCY CONTACT:	PHONE NUMBER: EMAIL ADDRESS:
<p style="text-align: center;">Indicators that I may need to refer to my safety plan:</p>	
<p>When I am feeling stressed or upset, I tend to exhibit or experience the following signs:</p>	
<p>PHYSICAL INDICATORS (such as headaches, shortness of breath, digestive issues, insomnia):</p>	
<p>BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS (such as pacing, self-harm, skipping work or school, checking things over and over, self-medicating with substances, changes in eating habits):</p>	
<p>RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS (such as working longer hours, avoiding people, difficulty communicating, arguing):</p>	
<p>EMOTIONAL INDICATORS (such as irritability, talking rapidly, crying, wanting to be alone, difficulty concentrating, feelings of panic):</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Understanding why I feel this way:</p>	
<p>PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT THESE WARNING SIGNS TEND TO BE SET OFF BY THESE STRESSORS (social situations, responsibilities, being reminded of a life experience or stressful situation, concern about something happening):</p>	

# SAFETY PLAN WORKSHEET

When there are warning signs, here are ways I would like to:

CARE FOR MY BASIC NEEDS (take a nap, eat favorite foods, stay hydrated, take prescribed medications, etc.):

SEEK COMFORT (such as ways to relax, items I want near me that bring me happiness, physical touch like a hug or holding a pet, books to read, or music since an uplifting melody can actually improve mood):

SEEK CHANGE (such as a change of surroundings, change of sensations like take a shower or go for a run, phrases or grounding thoughts that help change my perspective):

READY TO CONFRONT (Problem-solve specific concerns, finding reasonable expectations, tasks, and next steps):

Help me to gently refocus in these ways:

HERE ARE SOME OTHER THINGS THAT I LIKE FOR PEOPLE TO SAY, DO, OR SUGGEST THAT HELP ME TO GENTLY REFOCUS ON POSITIVE THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ME (such as remind me of a favorite verse or quote, song, affirm values, etc.):

If I need a friend to talk to, I will call/visit with:

NAME:	PHONE: EMAIL:
NAME:	PHONE: EMAIL:
NAME:	PHONE: EMAIL:



## SAFETY PLAN WORKSHEET

Access to lethal means:	
If needed, I will help keep myself safe by voluntarily reducing access to/safely storing the following items to these specifications:	
FIREARMS/AMMUNITION:	
MEDICATIONS/SUBSTANCES (such as prescriptions, over-the-counter meds, alcohol, drugs):	
SHARP OR OTHER DANGEROUS OBJECTS (such as knives, razor blades, car keys):	
HOUSEHOLD ITEMS (such as ropes, cords, chemicals):	
People/places that can help keep these items safe/securely stored:	
NAME:	PHONE: EMAIL:
FIREARMS STORAGE LOCATION:	
Additional contacts:	
MEDICAL DOCTOR:	PHONE: EMAIL:
THERAPIST/COUNSELOR:	PHONE: EMAIL:
PASTOR/PRIEST:	PHONE: EMAIL:
NAME:	PHONE: EMAIL:
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In an emergency, call 911.	

## RESOURCES



“

When we change the way we see things,  
the things we see will change.”

Wayne Dyer

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** 1-800-273-8255 provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention, and crisis resources for you or your loved ones. Some metropolitan areas can connect to the Lifeline by dialing 988; the dialing code will be available to everyone across the United States effective July 16, 2022.

**Call 988**

### **Emergency Services**

**911** is always a phone call away to send help during a crisis when you or a loved one is in immediate danger and needs urgent intervention. In some cities, texting 911 is also an option. Visit [911.gov](https://www.911.gov) to find out if text-to-911 support is available in your area.

**Call 911**

**Hold My Guns** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that connects responsible firearm owners during times of mental health crisis or personal need with voluntary, private, off-site storage options through its national network of partnering gun shops and FFLs.

**HoldMyGuns.org**

### **National Shooting Sports**

**Foundation** is an industry trade association of which AG & AG is a member. NSSF works with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to reduce suicide by firearm and also offers Project ChildSafe, an initiative for safe storage resources that can be helpful when someone in the household is suicidal.

**NSSF.org**

**A Girl & A Gun** is a nationwide community of women shooters. The club teaches that the following Safety Rules must always be obeyed:

1. Treat all guns as if they are always loaded.
2. Never let the muzzle cover (gun point at) anything that you are not willing to destroy.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target and you have made the decision to shoot.
4. Be sure of your target and what is behind it.

And always secure your guns from unauthorized persons.

**Thank you** to Sarah Joy Albrecht of Hold My Guns and Dr. Robert Young of Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership for their contributions to this material.