Teens, Depression and Guns

How are teens, depression and guns connected?

- Research has shown that one in five teens will go through a period of major depression by the time they are 18 years of age.
- Depressed teens are at risk for suicide.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Oregonians aged 15-24.
- Most teens and preteens who die by suicide used a gun to do so.

Why guns pose a risk:

- Guns are quick and deadly.
- Suicide crises are often short-term. Having access to a gun makes it easier to carry out the act.
- Many people keep unlocked guns in their homes, making them easy to get.
- Preteens and teens who complete suicide often get the gun from their home or the home of a relative or friend.

To protect your child:

- Always store guns unloaded, uncocked and locked in a gun safe or lock box. Only parents should know where the gun safe or lock box is kept.
- Use trigger locks on all guns, even when they are locked up. The more you can slow your teen down, the better.
- Store and lock bullets in a separate place.
- Avoid devices that use keys – preteens and teens often know where the keys are.
- If a family member is depressed or suicidal, remove guns from your home.
- When your child goes to a friend’s home, ask if there is a gun in the home and how it is stored.
- Talk with your child about guns when you discuss other risks, like alcohol and drugs.

What you can do:

The best way to protect your family from gun violence is to remove guns from your home. This is especially important if a family member is depressed or suicidal, or is using drugs or alcohol.

If you choose to keep guns in your home, you can help protect your family by storing guns safely. Locking up guns makes it harder to act on impulse when depressed.
Teens, Depression and Guns

Listen, ask questions and get help when needed.
If you think a preteen or teen is depressed or suicidal, don't wait to help.
• Listen – Show them that you care about how they are feel by listening.
• Ask questions – Be direct and ask if they have thought about suicide.
• Get help when needed – If they say they have thought about suicide or you think they have thought about it, get help right away.
  • If you’re not the parent, tell the parent. Or, tell the school counselor, a mental health professional or call the crisis line at 800-273-8255.
  • Do not keep it a secret!

Resources:
To learn more about depression and suicide in preteens and teens, go to:
• Youth Suicide Prevention Program www.yspp.org
• Mental Health America www.mentalhealthamerica.net
• American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org
• Means Matter www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter

For help during a crisis:
✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

To learn more:
✓ Lane County Public Health Prevention Program: www.preventionlane.org
✓ Your healthcare provider

For more information on safe gun storage:
• Lok-It-Up www.lokitup.org

To learn ways to ask if guns are safely stored in the homes your child visits, go to:
• PAX www.paxusa.org/ask

This publication was originally published by Seattle Children’s Hospital and has been adapted with permission. Seattle Children’s Hospital is not responsible for any inaccuracies in content different from the content of the original English edition. This material has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s healthcare provider.