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## Reducing Firearms Related Risk

Tasmania Police is committed to ensuring that our communities are safe places to live, work and raise a family, while supporting lawful firearm owners who valuably contribute to our state.

### Firearm Safety Priorities for Tasmania Police

#### 1. REDUCING FIREARMS RELATED DEATHS

**Over 87% of firearms related deaths in Tasmania are suicide<sup>1</sup>.** Preventing these deaths is an important priority. Please see the information below to assist you to **recognise and help** a person who may be at risk. If you or anyone you know needs guidance or assistance with their mental health, please discuss options with your GP or call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Mental Health Service Helpline on 1800 332 388.

**Call 000 in a life-threatening emergency**

#### 2. REDUCING FIREARMS RELATED CRIME

**Most serious firearms related crime is committed by people without firearms licences<sup>2</sup>.** Call Crime Stoppers if you have knowledge of a person who has possession of a firearm they should not have on 1800 333 000.

#### 3. REDUCING FIREARMS RELATED ACCIDENTS

**Firearms with certain mechanical defects may be unsafe and can injure the user.** If you possess a firearm which you think may be unsafe, contact Firearms Services or a firearms

dealer. Many firearms dealers can assess a firearm in order to determine if it is safe to use and may be able to repair it if it is not. Always follow the National Firearms Safety Code to prevent accidents.

### Coroner's Court statistics for firearms related suicide in Tasmania (2012 – 2018)<sup>3</sup>

- 66% of deaths involved a registered firearm.
- 47% of cases used a registered firearm that belonged to the licence holder.
- 12% were unlicensed but accessed a firearm that was registered to a licensed family member.
- **Where an unlicensed person accessed a registered firearm**, in 85% of cases they did so without permission of the firearm's owner and gained access to the safe by either finding a key, or using force to gain access to storage facilities.

### People who might be at risk of suicide<sup>4</sup>

**This list is not exhaustive:**

- People who **currently** have suicidal thoughts.
- People **in distress** who have **attempted suicide in the past**.
- People who are struggling with their mental health or have substance use issues, especially if they are **also coping with painful life crises** (e.g., relationship breakups, legal problems, financial crises, housing dislocation, job loss).
- People who have been **sad all the time** for 2 weeks or more.





## If you, a friend or a family member might be at risk<sup>5</sup>

### WHAT TO KNOW

- **A suicidal crisis can escalate quickly.**  
This doesn't mean it occurs out of the blue. However, a person may go rapidly from feeling distressed, to having suicidal thoughts, to ultimately making an attempt. Experts identify that acute intoxication with alcohol or drugs can contribute to rapid escalation. The impulse to end one's life and the readiness to actually go through with an attempt are usually short-lived and do go away. The crisis usually fades, but it may flare up from time to time.
- **A suicidal crisis is hard to predict,** triggered not only by mental health or substance use issues, but often by stress and external events, such as an arrest, an argument, or a relationship breakup.
- Since a suicidal crisis is often difficult to predict and can escalate rapidly, it is important to reduce access to lethal methods **before a suicidal crisis occurs.** Preventing access to lethal means (e.g. a firearm) can help save a person's life.
- If you, or someone you know, is struggling with despair, carrying out some **simple steps to reduce access to lethal methods** will make the situation safer if suicidal feelings arise.

### WHAT TO DO

#### 1. Store firearms for safety

Storing firearms away from the home temporarily is the safest choice. Here are some options:

- store with a **relative or friend:** be sure they have a firearms licence of the relevant category and can store the firearms in accordance with the act/regulations
- store with a **firearms dealer:** they will charge a fee to store firearms on your behalf
- store with **police:** firearms can be temporarily surrendered to police until the crisis has passed.

If storage away from home is not possible, there are other options:

- keep the keys to firearms receptacles away from the person at risk
- change the combination to the storage receptacle
- store a key component (like the slide or bolt) separately or away from the home
- remove ammunition temporarily from the home.

Quick and easy access to a firearm during a suicidal crisis adds a lot of risk. If none of these storage options are possible, anything that delays access can help.

Taking any of these steps gives the person at risk time to change their mind.

#### 2. Learn other ways to get help

Sometimes coping with a difficult situation requires help.

- **Call 000 in a life-threatening emergency**
- A GP can refer a person to mental health services, discuss medical treatment options and draw up a Mental Health Treatment Plan to help get a person through a time of crisis
- The Suicide Call Back Service offer 24/7 suicide related counselling: 1300 659 467
- Lifeline offer 24/7 crisis counselling: 13 11 14
- Mental Health Helpline 1800 332 388

### To prevent accidents, follow the National Firearms Safety Code:

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
2. Your firearm is your responsibility.
3. Always ensure your firing zone is clear and identify your target beyond all doubt.
4. Never point a firearm at or near another person.
5. Never load a firearm until you are ready to shoot.
6. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
7. When you have finished shooting remove the magazine (if fitted), unload and then check that the chamber is empty.
8. Make sure that all firearms are transported securely to prevent misuse or theft.
9. Never allow unauthorised access to your firearm(s) or ammunition.
10. Do not climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms.

11. Encourage safe and responsible handling of firearms in the field, on the range, and within the community.
12. Never mix shooting with alcohol or drugs.
13. Understand the operation of your firearm, keep it in good repair, and always use the correct ammunition.
14. Never store firearms and ammunition together. Ensure they are safely locked away when not in use.
15. Be familiar with the legal requirements for safe storage, firearms ownership, possession and use in your state or territory, or in the state or territory you are visiting.
16. Dispose of unwanted firearms lawfully. Surrender them to the police or sell them to, or through, a licensed dealer.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (MA, USA) for the use of their materials in the preparation of this document, and the Coronial Division of the Magistrates Court of Tasmania for the use of Tasmanian coronial data.

## Notes

1. *Tasmanian Suicide Register (2012 – 2018)*, Coronial Division of the Magistrates Court of Tasmania.
2. For example: *The licensing and registration status of firearms used in homicide (2000)*, Australian Institute of Criminology.
3. *Tasmanian Suicide Register (2012 – 2018)*, Coronial Division of the Magistrates Court of Tasmania.
4. Adapted from *Clients Who Need Lethal Means Counseling* © 2019 Education Development Center, Inc. Used with permission.
5. Adapted from *What Clients and Families Need to Know* © 2019 Education Development Center, Inc. Used with permission.



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Current as at October 2021