

# 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 teens in Washington.
- Most teens and preteens who commit 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 feel by listening.

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- **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](http://www.yspp.org)
  - National Mental Health Association  
[www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/concerned.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/concerned.asp)
  - American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)
  - Means Matter  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter)
- For more information on safe gun storage:
  - Lok-It-Up  
[www.lokitup.org](http://www.lokitup.org)
- For help during a crisis:
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
800-273-8255
- To learn ways to ask if guns are safely stored in the homes your child visits, go to:
  - PAX  
[www.paxusa.org/ask](http://www.paxusa.org/ask)

#### To Learn More

- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)
- **Seattle Children's Resource Line**  
**206-987-2500 or 866-987-2500**  
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- **Your child's healthcare provider**

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Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5205 or 206-987-2280 (TTY).

This handout 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.

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