

# Lock it for life — Simple steps to keep loved ones safe



Most unintentional firearm injuries and a significant portion of firearm suicides involve guns that were not stored securely. Safe firearm storage prevents unauthorized access, reduces risk during a mental health crisis, and protects children, adults, and visitors in the home. Practicing responsible gun ownership saves lives.



## Why safe storage matters

- Nearly 4.6 million children in the U.S. live in homes with at least one loaded, unsecured firearm.
- Children and teens often know where guns are stored, even when adults believe they do not.
- Storing firearms locked and unloaded can reduce the risk of suicide and unintentional injury by up to 78%.
- Over half of all firearm deaths in Virginia are suicides — secure storage prevents access in crisis moments.
- Safe storage helps prevent firearm theft, reducing the number of guns diverted into illegal use.

## Safe storage steps

- Store all firearms **unloaded** when not in use.
- Use a **gun safe, lockbox, or locked cabinet** made of durable materials.
- Install **cable locks** or **trigger locks** for an added layer of protection.
- Store ammunition in a completely separate and locked location.
- Use biometric or digital safes if quick access is needed for defensive purposes.
- Ensure all guests, babysitters, or visiting family members cannot access firearms.
- Regularly check locks and safes to ensure they function properly.
- During periods of emotional distress or risk of self-harm in the household, temporarily store firearms outside the home with trusted individuals or law enforcement (if available).

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## Additional safe practices

- Teach children never to touch a firearm and to leave the area and tell an adult if they see one.
- Maintain a habit of verifying guns are unloaded before cleaning or transporting.
- Use lockable firearm cases when traveling in vehicles.
- Keep keys or combinations to firearm storage devices hidden and inaccessible.
- Document firearm serial numbers and keep them securely stored in case of theft.

## Talking about firearm safety

- Approach conversations with empathy — your goal is shared safety, not debate.
- Ask other parents, caregivers, or relatives about firearm storage before your child visits their home.
- Normalize safety questions the same way you would ask about allergies, pets, or swimming pools.
- Share resources like free locks or community storage programs without judgment.



## Local and national resources

- Be SMART for Kids — [besmartforkids.org](https://www.besmartforkids.org)
- Project ChildSafe — Free locks and educational tools: [projectchildsafe.org](https://www.projectchildsafe.org)
- Virginia Department of Health Injury and Violence Prevention — [vdh.virginia.gov/injury-and-violence-prevention](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/injury-and-violence-prevention)
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — Call or text **988**.
- Safe firearm storage guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics — [aap.org](https://www.aap.org)

Firearm safety is a shared responsibility. Sentara Norfolk General Hospital encourages all community members to practice secure firearm storage to prevent unintentional injuries, suicides, and tragedies.

Together, we can make every home safer.