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Talking About Gun Storage: A Guide for Health and Mental Health Professionals

Gun violence is one of the [leading causes of death in the United States](#), especially for children, teens, and individuals in crisis. As a trusted provider, you have an important role in preventing these tragedies. You can make a difference by having respectful conversations about firearm safety and storage. These conversations are not about taking away rights. They are about protecting lives and promoting safety and well-being.

Why These Conversations Are Important

In Colorado, clinicians are legally permitted to ask about firearm access. [Research](#) shows that most gun owners support these discussions when someone may be at risk. The key is how the conversation is framed. Approaching it from a place of care, rather than control, makes patients more open to talking.

Many firearm owners cite their reasons for owning a gun such as hunting, protection, sport, or family tradition. Recognizing these values [helps build trust](#) and makes the conversation more productive.

How to Begin the Conversation

Start with a calm, nonjudgmental tone. Using routine language [helps normalize the topic](#). For example:

- “Many people keep guns in their homes. Is that something you do?”

Once the topic is introduced, focus the conversation on shared goals like safety and harm prevention. Reassure the person that there are many ways to store firearms securely without losing access when needed.

Avoid using terms like “confiscate” or “restrict.” Instead, say:

- “Temporarily store”
- “Hold for safekeeping”
- “Keep secure”

This type of language [can reduce defensiveness](#) and lead to more open dialogue.



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The 5 Ls: A Simple Framework for Assessing Risk

To guide the conversation, consider the 5 Ls. This framework can help you assess whether firearms in the home are stored safely:

1. **Loaded:** Is the firearm stored loaded or unloaded?
2. **Locked:** Is it secured in a locked device?
3. **Little children:** Are children ever in the home?
4. **Low mood:** Is anyone in the household feeling depressed, anxious, or at risk?
5. **Learned:** Is the firearm user trained and cognitively capable?

These questions open the door to important safety discussions and provide context for recommending storage solutions.

Safe Storage Options to Share with Patients

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Fortunately, many secure storage options are available to fit different routines and living situations:

- **Full-Size Gun Safes:** Best for households with multiple firearms. Often include biometric locks and are most secure when bolted in place.
- **Lock Boxes:** Come in passcode or fingerprint-access versions. Offer quick access while keeping firearms out of unauthorized hands.
- **Trigger Locks or Cable Locks:** Inexpensive and widely available. These prevent the firing mechanism from being used.
- **Gun Cases:** Portable and useful for transport. Adding a lock can make them safer at home.
- **Vehicle Safes:** Should only be used when home storage is not an option. A locked console or trunk safe reduces theft risk.
- **Cargo Area Storage:** Designed for SUVs and trucks, offering concealed transport to and from recreational areas.
- **Wireless Safe Monitors:** Alert owners of unauthorized access using alarms or smartphone notifications.



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- Temporary Out-of-Home Storage: Ideal during times of crisis, travel, or renovation. Offers a way to reduce access without giving up ownership.
- Limit Access to Keys and Codes: Keys and combinations should be stored securely and shared only with trusted adults.

A Trusted Role in Promoting Safety

You do not need to be a firearms expert to help your patients. A respectful conversation guided by curiosity and concern can have a lasting impact. Asking about safe storage is an act of care that can prevent harm and support individuals through moments of risk.

To explore firearm storage solutions and view Colorado's out-of-home storage map, visit LetsTalkGunsColorado.com/gun-owners.

