



VA | U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MINUTES MATTER

OPTIONS FOR SECURE FIREARM STORAGE



Clinician Guide



Joseph Boffa, Ph.D. | Claire Houtsma, Ph.D. | Dustin Seidler, Ph.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>A Secure Storage Plan</i>	3
Reasons to Securely Store Firearms	3
How to Develop a Minutes Matter Secure Storage Plan	4
Minutes Matter Secure Storage Plan	5
<i>Resources for Veterans</i>	9
Firearm Storage Devices and Alternative Storage Locations	9
Additional Education About Secure Firearm Storage	10
<i>References</i>	11

The authors would like to thank Jennifer L. Bryan, Ph.D. and Ali Abbas Asghar-Ali, M.D. for their enthusiastic contributions to the writing, editing, and design of this product. We greatly appreciate their guidance and support.



A Secure Storage Plan

Reasons to Securely Store Firearms

Securing firearms is an important responsibility.

Suicide

- Ninety percent of firearm suicide attempts are fatal.¹ Seventy percent of Veteran suicides are by firearm.²
- Nearly 25% of all suicide attempts occur in the first five minutes of a suicidal crisis. Roughly 70% occur within one hour.³

Minutes matter.

- Risk for suicide is higher when firearms are stored unlocked and loaded.^{4,5}
- Increasing the time it takes to access a loaded firearm may save a life.

Minutes matter.



Child Safety

- Three out of four children know where firearms are kept in their home.⁶
- Teaching children not to touch firearms does not stop them from doing so.⁷
- Firearms are the #1 cause of death among children. Firearms involved in youth deaths are often stored loaded, unlocked and in a bedroom.⁸
- Up to 30% of youth firearm injuries and deaths could be prevented by storing firearms more securely.⁹ **Minutes matter.**

Theft

- A firearm is stolen every 90 seconds.¹⁰
- 25% of stolen firearms are stolen from personal vehicles.¹¹
- Firearms are three times more likely to be stolen when brought out of the home.¹⁰
- Stolen firearms may be sold illegally and used to commit a crime.¹¹
- Keeping firearms unsecured, even for personal safety, increases the risk of danger in our communities.



A Secure Storage Plan

How to Develop a Minutes Matter Secure Storage Plan

Use the **Minutes Matter Secure Storage Plan** (Page 12) to identify all the possible combinations of options for securely storing firearms.

STEP 1 includes places where a firearm may be stored. They are listed, from bottom to top, from the least to most amount of time it would take to access a firearm. In-home storage is often preferred and there are many options for this choice. Some, such as a gun safe, require more time to access than other options, like a nightstand. Out-of-home storage (ex: with a friend, at a retailer) provides the most time and distance. It is a great option when there are concerns about the safety of those in the home. It is essential to be familiar with local laws and ensure Veterans or their family members are also aware of the laws.

STEP 2 includes additional ways to delay the use a firearm. This is especially helpful when in-home storage methods are chosen. For example, one could store ammunition in a closet separate from the firearm; the firearm unloaded and without the firing pin in a nightstand; and the firearm's firing pin in a hard to reach place.

***Note:** Options in Steps 1 and 2 can be combined for single or multiple firearms owned. Use as many options as needed. The plan can be filled out online or on paper by checking the appropriate fields. If multiple firearms are owned, use separate sheets for each, or assign different numbers, initials, or colored inks to indicate the storage option for each firearm.*

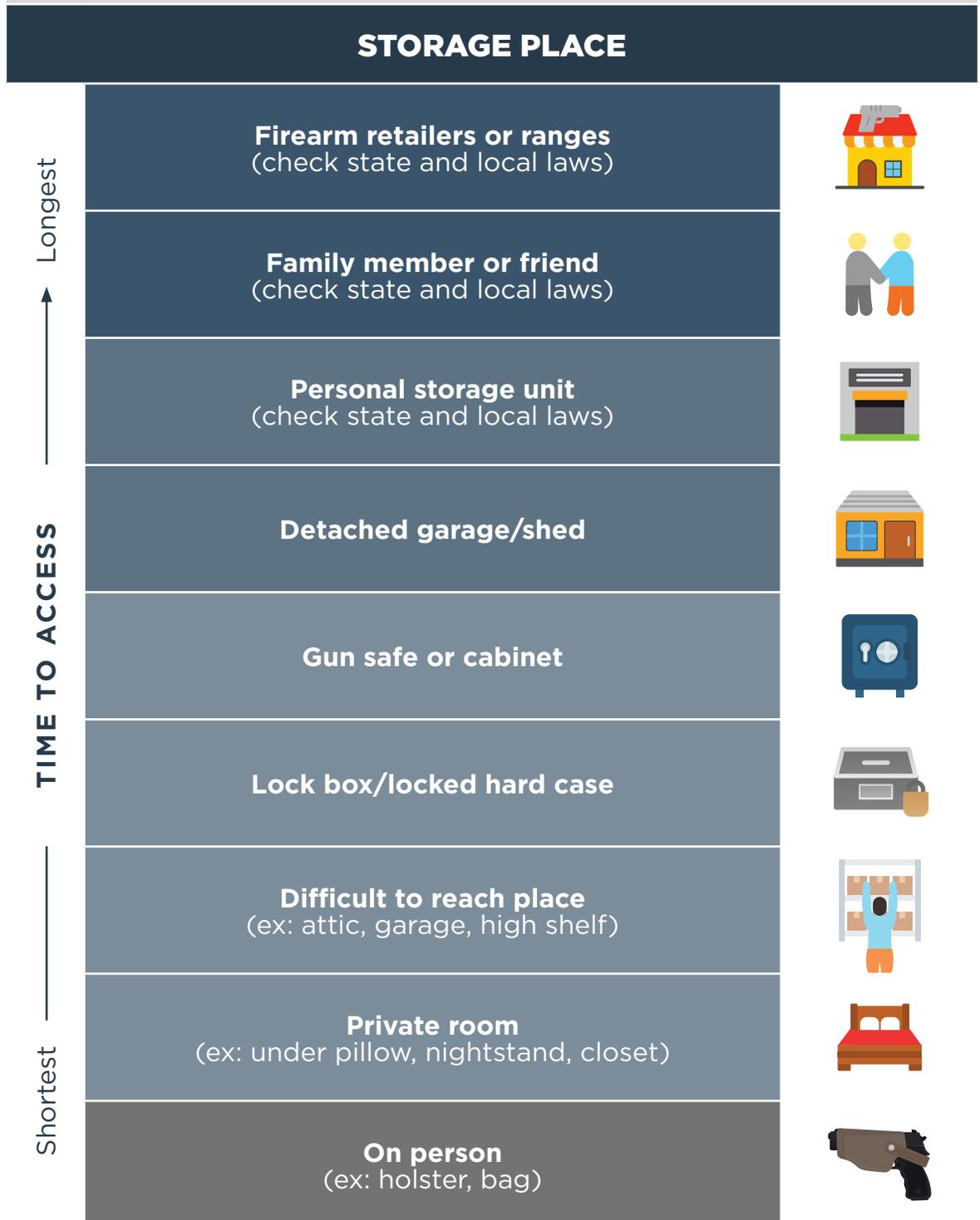
STEP 3 includes space to write the plan for securely storing firearms. This includes selections from Steps 1 and 2. It can also include future steps toward secure storage, like talking about storage with family or saving for an expensive option like a biometric safe. You can also note reasons to change storage plans (ex: when grandchildren visit) and list people who can help carry out these plans (ex: spouse, parent).



MINUTES MATTER

OPTIONS FOR SECURE FIREARM STORAGE

STEP 1. Pick a place to securely store your firearm(s).

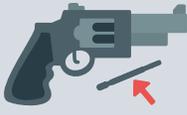


MINUTES MATTER

OPTIONS FOR SECURE FIREARM STORAGE



STEP 2. Add time to access with extra safety measures.

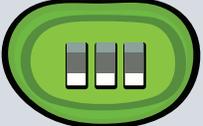
DISASSEMBLE THE FIREARM		ASK SOMEONE ELSE
Remove firing pin 	Disassemble 	Give key/code to others 

REMOVE AMMUNITION		
Unloaded 	Chamber flag 	Separate ammo 

USE DIFFERENT LOCKS FOR LOCKBOX, CABINET, OR SAFE

Biometric 	Keypad 	Combo 	Key 
--	---	---	--

STORE WITH REMINDERS	LOCK THE FIREARM
----------------------	------------------

VCL number 	Safety plan 	Cable lock 	Trigger lock 
---	--	--	---



MINUTES MATTER

OPTIONS FOR SECURE FIREARM STORAGE

STEP 3. My plans to securely store firearms:

1. _____

2. _____

What might change about this plan:

Who will help me with this plan:

STEP 1. Pick a place to securely store your firearm(s).

STORAGE PLACE

Firearm retailers or ranges
(check state and local laws)

Family member or friend
(check state and local laws)

Personal storage unit
(check state and local laws)

Detached garage/shed

Gun safe or cabinet

Lock box/locked hard case

Difficult to reach place
(ex: attic, garage, high shelf)

Private room
(ex: under pillow, nightstand, closet)

On person
(ex: holster, bag)



Longest

TIME TO ACCESS

Shortest

STEP 2. Add time to access with extra safety measures.

DISASSEMBLE THE FIREARM

Remove firing pin



Disassemble



ASK SOMEONE ELSE

Give key/code to others



REMOVE AMMUNITION

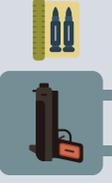
Unloaded



Chamber flag



Separate ammo



USE DIFFERENT LOCKS FOR LOCKBOX, CABINET, OR SAFE

Biometric



Keypad



Combo



Key



STORE WITH REMINDERS

VCL number

9-8-8 + 1

Safety plan



Cable lock



Trigger lock



STEP 3. My plans to securely store firearms:

1. _____
What might change about this plan: _____

2. _____
Who will help me with this plan: _____

Resources for Veterans

Firearm Storage Devices and Alternative Storage Locations

Type	Description
VA Resources	<p>Cable Locks</p> <p>Available from your local VA, many police stations, and many local safety coalitions</p> <p>Request a free cable lock from a local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator: https://www.va.gov/find-locations/.</p>
Other Resources	<p>Cable Locks*</p> <p>Available from your local VA, many police stations, and many local safety coalitions</p> <p>Project Child Safe free safety kit: https://projectchildsafe.org/get-a-safety-kit/</p>
	<p>Chamber Flags, Trigger Locks, Lock Boxes, Safes, and Gun Cabinets*</p> <p>Available from local firearm retailers, sporting goods stores, and sometimes large retailers</p>
	<p>GunSkin*</p> <p>FREE (for Veterans) vinyl wraps with images of loved ones that can be applied to pistol grips</p> <p>https://covermeveterans.org/</p>
	<p>Voluntary Out-of-Home*</p> <p>Maps to find firearm retailers and, in some states, law enforcement locations that offer temporary out-of-home storage services</p> <p>National: https://pausetoprotect.org/secure-storage/##ss-outofhome-options</p> <p>Louisiana: www.armoryproject.org</p> <p>Colorado: https://pausetoprotect.org/secure-storage/##ss-outofhome-options</p> <p>New Jersey: https://gunviolenceresearchcenter.rutgers.edu/nj-firearm-storage-map/</p> <p>Washington: https://fiprp.uw.edu/tools-dissemination/resources/</p> <p>Maryland: https://mdpgv.org/safestoragemap/</p> <p>Mississippi: http://mikeanestis.weebly.com/ms-gun-storage-map.html</p> <p>New York: https://rockinst.org/blog/new-york-firearm-storage-map/</p> <p>Wisconsin: https://www.betherewis.com/firearm-storage-online-map/</p>

*not an endorsement or VA Resource

Resources for Veterans

Additional Education about Secure Firearm Storage

Type	Description
VA Resources	<p>Storage Education and Conversation Tips</p> <p>A Veteran’s Guide to Discussing STORES: Secure Storage to Reduce Suicide Risk – designed to help Veterans talk to other Veterans about secure firearm storage for suicide prevention</p> <p><i>https://www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/a-veterans-guide-to-discussing-stores.asp</i></p>
Other Resources	<p>Storage Education and Conversation Tips*</p> <p>Worried About a Veteran – helps individuals identify potential firearm storage options and offers guidance on how to have a conversation about firearm storage with a Veteran</p> <p><i>https://worriedaboutaveteran.org/</i></p>
	<p>Storage Education and How to Install a Cable Lock*</p> <p>Project Child Safe – helps individuals identify potential firearm storage options</p> <p><i>https://projectchildsafe.org/securing-your-firearm/</i></p>
	<p>Storage Education*</p> <p>Lock2Live – tool to help make decisions about temporarily reducing access to firearms</p> <p><i>https://lock2live.org/</i></p>
	<p>Storage Education and Conversation Tips*</p> <p>BulletPoints Project – helps identify potential firearm storage options and offers guidance on how to have a conversation about firearm storage with patients</p> <p><i>https://www.bulletpointsproject.org/</i></p>
	<p>Firearm Culture Education*</p> <p>Walk the Talk America – course and other resources to help mental health providers (and others) learn about gun culture and suicide prevention</p> <p><i>https://walkthetalkamerica.org/classes/</i></p>

**not an endorsement or VA Resource*

References

1. Cai, Z., Junus, A., Chang, Q., & Yip, P. S. (2022). The lethality of suicide methods: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 300, 121-129. [doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2021.12.054](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.12.054)
2. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. 2023. Retrieved January 24, 2024 from <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2023/2023-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>.
3. Simon, T. R., Swann, A. C., Powell, K. E., Potter, L. B., Kresnow, M., & O'Carroll, P. W. (2001). Characteristics of impulsive suicide attempts and attempters. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 32(Supplement to Issue 1), 49-59. [doi: 10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212](https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212)
4. Dempsey, C. L., Benedek, D. M., Zuromski, K. L., et al. (2019). Association of firearm ownership, use, accessibility, and storage practices with suicide risk among US Army soldiers. *JAMA Network Open*, 2(6), e195383-e195383. [doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5383](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5383)
5. Shenassa, E. D., Rogers, M. L., Spalding, K. L., & Roberts, M. B. (2004). Safer storage of firearms at home and risk of suicide: A study of protective factors in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 58(10), 841-848. [doi: 10.1136/jech.2003.017343](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2003.017343)
6. Baxley, F., & Miller, M. (2006). Parental misperceptions about children and firearms. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 160(5), 542-547. [doi: 10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542](https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542)
7. Holly, C., Porter, S., Kamienski, M., & Lim, A. (2019). School-based and community-based gun safety educational strategies for injury prevention. *Health Promotion Practice*. 20(1), 38-47. [doi: 10.1177/1524839918774571](https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839918774571)
8. Wilson, R. F. (2023). Unintentional Firearm Injury Deaths Among Children and Adolescents Aged 0-17 Years—National Violent Death Reporting System, United States, 2003-2021. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 72. [doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a1](https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a1)
9. Monuteaux, M. C., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019). Association of increased safe household firearm storage with firearm suicide and unintentional death among US youths. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173(7), 657-662. [doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078)
10. Hemenway, D., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2017). Whose guns are stolen? The epidemiology of gun theft victims. *Injury Epidemiology*, 4(1), 1-5. [doi: 10.1186/s40621-017-0109-8](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-017-0109-8)
11. Stolzenberg, L., & D'alessio, S.J. (2000). Gun availability and violent crime: New evidence from the national incident-based reporting system. *Social Forces*, 78(4), 1461-1482. [doi: 10.1093/sf/78.4.1461](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/78.4.1461)

The views expressed in this guide are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government. This guide was supported by a clinical educator grant from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC). This manual can be downloaded at www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/minutes-matter.asp. For a hardcopy of the manual, please contact VISN16SCMIRECCEducation@va.gov.