

SAFE Firearm Clinician Guide

Research shows that even **small improvements in secure firearm storage can prevent firearm injuries and deaths**—including suicides.

Program Goals

- **Normalize universal counseling** about secure firearm storage and offer **free firearm cable locks** as a routine part of visits.
- **Increase the number of people using secure firearm storage practices.**
- **Reduce firearm injuries and deaths** by promoting more secure home environments.

What are we doing?

1. **A 1-minute, harm-reduction-focused firearm storage conversation** during adult primary care and OBGYN well visits, and 24-week prenatal visits.
2. **Offering a free firearm cable lock** and informational handout to patients at all of these visits.

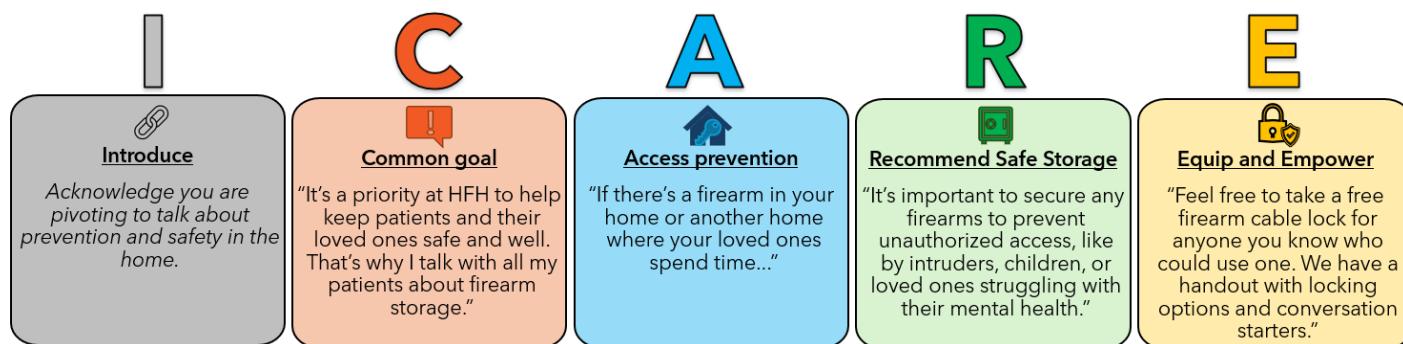
IMPORTANT: Counseling & locks should be offered at every eligible visit, without screening for firearm ownership.

How does it work?






Step 1: Find out where locks are stored at your clinic and where they will be distributed (during visits in exam room, freely available in waiting room, or both).

Step 2: Having the Conversation.

Position the conversation as a normal part of your safety and prevention counseling (e.g., sunscreen). Develop your own advice "script." An example is below **using the I CARE acronym!**



Step 3: Answer Questions - Physicians who have conducted SAFE Firearm report that patients often interrupt for one of the following reasons:

Patient says...	Suggested clinician response...
 <p>"We don't have any firearms."</p>	<p>"We believe firearm safety conversations are for everyone in our community. Our handout provides some conversation starters for family and friends, as sometimes our loved ones can access firearms in other people's homes."</p>
 <p>"I need to be able to defend myself and my family."</p>	<p>"It sounds like keeping your family safe is a priority. This handout includes information on quick access safes, which allow fast access but help ensure unauthorized people, like children or intruders, can't access firearms."</p>
 <p>"My kids know not to touch my guns."</p>	<p>"It's great that many firearm owners in the community talk to their kids about firearm safety. Unfortunately, kids are naturally curious, and accidents can happen. This handout shares more about different locking options that help ensure unauthorized people don't access firearms."</p>
 <p>Silence or dismissive response: "sounds good, thanks."</p>	<p>Respect their signal that they don't want to talk about this and just move on.</p>
 <p>Defensive response: "I don't think it's appropriate to discuss firearms in this visit."</p>	<p>Keep the door open for the future: "Thank you for letting me know, I respect that. We don't need to discuss firearms any further. I want you to know that this is a routine part of all my [primary care, OBGYN] visits, and my intent is to offer support for patients who are interested in discussing secure firearm storage."</p>

Reminders

- **Tailor:** Adjust the conversation based on how well you know the patient, who lives in the home, and risk factors such as depression, suicide risk, or violence risk. However, ensure patients understand this conversation is routine—not targeted at them.
- **Respect and emphasize privacy:** You can offer general secure storage counseling or talk more specifically about storage—use your judgment. If patients worry about documentation, reassure them you do not record patient firearm ownership or document whether patients take a lock.
- **Harm reduction approach:** Triple Safe Storage (locked, unloaded, ammunition locked separately) is ideal, but many patients—especially those keeping a handgun for protection—may not be open to this. Keep the conversation non-judgmental and focus on ways to make firearms inaccessible to unauthorized people using small steps that make the home safer.
- **Use Motivational Interviewing:** Ask open-ended questions. Reflect back what you hear to show understanding and support problem solving (e.g., "It sounds like quick access to a loaded firearm is really important to you.>").

Resources: Visit the SAFE Firearm website (<https://safe-firearm.org/>) for:

- Training slides and recordings
- Evidence-based research
- Patient handouts and clinic posters
- Contact for support: Dr. Erin Haley, ehaley1@hfhs.org