

SAMHSA's Suicide Awareness Series, Issue #2:

Counseling on Access to Lethal Means

Most suicide prevention efforts focus on why people attempt suicide. It's also important to focus on how.

That's the research-based premise behind a free online course called [Counseling on Access to Lethal Means](#) (CALM). Based on an in-person workshop that's part of the [best practice registry](#) of the SAMHSA-funded Suicide Prevention Resource Centers (SPRC), the online course was produced by the developers of the original workshop, the SPRC, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center at the Harvard School of Public Health, and the Injury Prevention Center at Dartmouth College.

While the program was designed for those who already have training and experience in mental health counseling, it is also appropriate for substance abuse counselors and primary care providers. The course emphasizes that restricting access to medications, firearms, and other lethal means should be part of a comprehensive prevention strategy.

That's because most suicidal people are ambivalent about wanting to die, and many suicide attempts are made impulsively, during a short-term crisis. Twenty-five percent of those aged 13 to 34 who almost died from suicide say that less than five minutes passed between the time they decided to kill themselves and an actual attempt, the course explains.

If highly lethal means are less available to impulsive attempters, the course emphasizes, the odds are better that they will survive. Despite the myth that taking away one method for suicide will simply cause someone to find another one, the truth is that 90 percent of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.

The course also teaches participants how to ask suicidal clients about their access to potentially dangerous items and how to work with people and their families to keep such items out of their hands.

The self-paced, guided course takes about two hours to complete. Students who finish the course, take a pre- and post-test, and provide feedback will receive a certificate of completion. They are also eligible for two hours of continuing education credit from the National Board for Certified Counselors or the National Association of Social Workers.

Resources

- Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention: [DRAFT Washington State Model Emotional, Behavioral and Suicide Crisis Plan, 2014](#)

Related Articles

- [Preventing Suicide: Following up After the Crisis](#)
- [Preventing Compassion Fatigue](#)