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Your requested information

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Firearm safety

Firearms and other weapons can be found in households across the country. In most situations, their presence creates no problems for responsible gun owners and others in the household. However, if someone in the home is living with Alzheimer's or another dementia, firearms can pose a significant risk for everyone.

For example, as the disease progresses, the person may not recognize someone they have known for years and view them as an intruder. With a gun accessible, the result could be disastrous. Even if the person has past experience with guns, their current abilities will be altered because the safe use of firearms requires complex cognitive abilities and quick decision-making skills, which may be compromised due to dementia.

Consider the following to help reduce risk:

- **Locking or disabling a gun may not be enough.**
  People living with dementia sometimes misperceive danger and may do whatever seems necessary to protect themselves, even if no threat exists. These actions can include breaking into gun cabinets, finding ammunition and loading guns. Preventing a gun from firing may not prevent the person living with dementia or others from being harmed.

- **Consider removing guns from the home to fully protect the family from an accident.**
  Family members sometimes attempt to hide their firearms or ammunition to prevent the person living with dementia from accessing them. They may lock the guns in an attic or in the trunk of a car, or keep ammunition outside of the home. These solutions are good first steps, but they do not ensure that the person will not find the gun or appear to be holding a loaded weapon, thereby causing those around the person to react.

It's critical that there be an open discussion among family members about all weapons in the home, including antiques, collections, war souvenirs, hunting equipment and decorative pieces. Just as legal, financial, care and driving plans are best made early in the disease process, it's important to consider current and future gun safety. Put a plan in place for what to do with firearms or other weapons both immediately and for when the person is no longer capable of handling them safely.

If there is a history of using firearms or other weapons for work or recreation, these conversations can be difficult, as they may threaten key aspects of the person's identity.

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The person may be very attached to their weapons, refusing to part with them. But alternate plans will need to be made for the storage, inheritance or disposal of weapons in order to ensure everyone's safety.

The following may help as you prepare to discuss firearms:

- Begin with a discussion of who might inherit various pieces. It may be good to talk about providing the inherited pieces to the recipient soon, so that person can provide for upkeep, use the weapon, etc. This can be a way to move to a discussion of safety at home when the responsibility for keeping firearms in good working order becomes too difficult or is no longer possible.
- Consider selling some valuable items that are no longer used to help pay for care. A collection of firearms could be considered as part of this discussion.
- Discuss donating an antique collection so that others can learn about and appreciate them.
- Include a trusted authority figure that is knowledgeable about the critical safety issues. Get agreement ahead of time from everyone involved that if that person says that the removal of the weapons from the home must be done as part of keeping family members safe, it will be done. Consider inviting trusted relatives, hunting buddies, etc., to take part in the conversation with the family.
- If there is no consent to remove the weapons, removal may need to be done against the person's wishes and should be done while they are out of the house. Take care to also remove reminders of the weapons, including cases, ammunition, racks and holsters.
- Address any anger or other emotions that may occur as a result of the change by acknowledging feelings.
- Redirecting to an activity that can be done together may help reduce feelings of anger or other emotions.
- If you need assistance removing the guns, your local law enforcement agency may be able to help.
- Laws around selling or transferring firearms vary from state to state. It is important to familiarize yourself with applicable laws in your state.

Visit **alz.org/safety** to learn more.

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