

## 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 open 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

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

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