

## Chapter 8

# Suicides — Guns Turned Inward

### Depiction Suggestions

◆ Be aware that while a teenager's suicidal thoughts may be fleeting, a gun's availability combined with the teen's impulsiveness may lead to irrevocable, fatal consequences.

*Two Maryland teens, both troubled and in love, entered into a suicide pact. The boy got his parents' gun and brought it to a secret meeting place where they'd planned to carry out their deaths. The girlfriend went first, pulling the trigger and dying instantly. Seeing the blood and bodily violence, the boy panicked and instead of going through with his own death, got help. In an unprecedented move in Maryland's history, he was charged with illegal possession of a handgun, reckless endangerment, and assisted suicide. He faces a future of regret, guilt, lost love, and possible criminal conviction.*

—story covered by 20/20

◆ Bear in mind that guns are used more often in suicides than homicides.

◆ Bear in mind that while some methods of suicide, such as a drug overdose, for example, leave time for the victim to reconsider, fire-arm suicides are instantaneous and nearly always fatal.

*A Minnesota teenager, on a father-son squirrel-hunting excursion, stumbled and accidentally shot his dad. Overcome with grief thinking he'd killed his father, the teen shot himself in the head. When his wounded father regained consciousness several hours later, he was shocked to find his son critically injured.*

—St. Paul Pioneer Planet, 11-6-99

◆ Look for possible opportunities to portray a family, concerned about a suicidal or homicidal loved one, getting rid of his/her gun or moving it off premises for safety as one of their intervention steps.

#### Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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## Suicides – Guns Turned Inward

### Fact Sheet

◆ In most gun deaths, the shooter is also the victim. In the U.S., more people kill themselves with guns than with all other methods combined.<sup>1</sup>

◆ Firearms are used in more suicides than homicides. In 1997, 54% of all gun deaths were suicides, and 43% were homicides.<sup>2</sup>

◆ Handguns account for over 70% of all firearm suicides.<sup>3</sup>

◆ Self-inflicted gunshot injuries were more likely to be fatal than other types of injuries; 90% of self-inflicted gunshot wounds were fatal.<sup>4</sup>

◆ Firearms were used in 58% of the 30,535 suicides in 1997.<sup>5</sup>

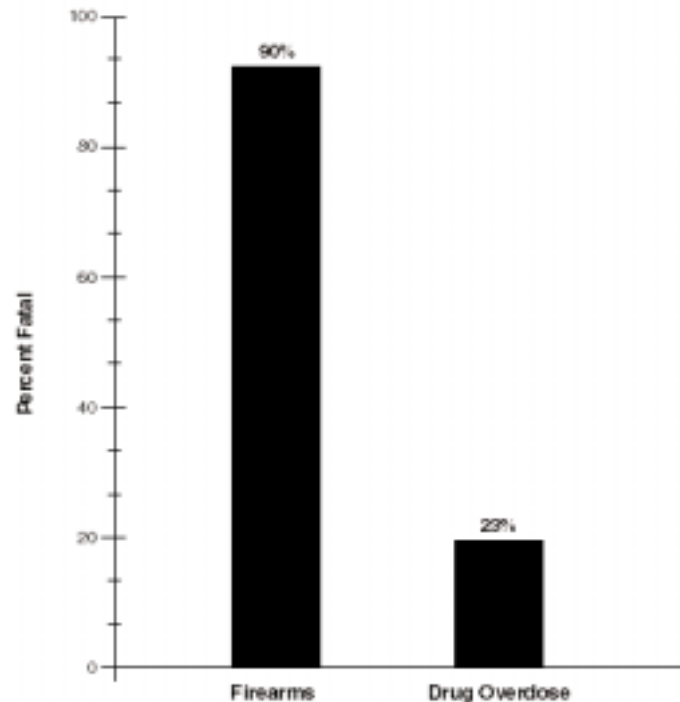
◆ The presence of a firearm increases the likelihood that suicide ideation will result in certain death.<sup>6</sup>

◆ Among young people 10 to 19 years old, there were 1,261 suicides with guns in 1997, more than three every day.<sup>7</sup>

◆ Ready availability of firearms is associated with an increased risk of suicide in the home.<sup>8</sup>

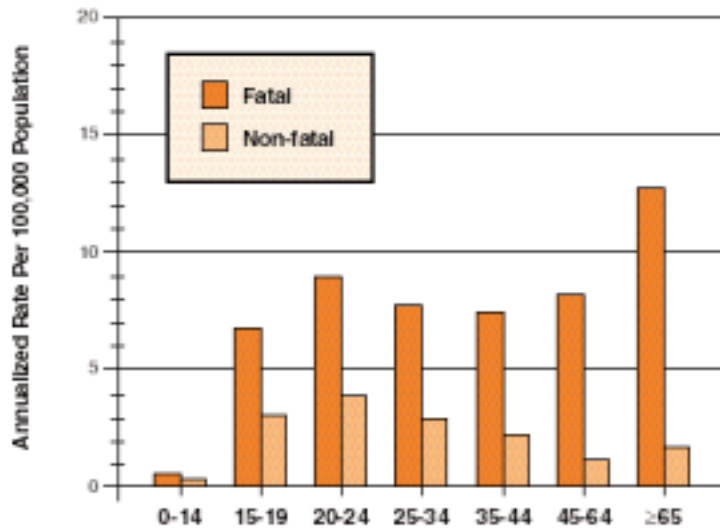
◆ Among 15 to 24 year olds, suicide is the third leading cause of death and firearms are used in 62% of the suicides.<sup>9</sup>

Percent of Suicide Attempts That Are Fatal, By Method



Source: Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania; Analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999 data.

Intentionally Self-Inflicted Fatal and Non-Fatal Firearm-Related Injury By Age In the U.S. From 1993 to 1998



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics, 2000.

◆ In 1997, 15.5% of firearm suicide victims were younger than 25.<sup>10</sup>

◆ Between 1980 and 1994, the overall suicide rate for persons ages 15 to 19 increased by 29%; the increase in firearm-related suicides accounted for 96% of the increase in the overall suicide rate.<sup>11</sup>

◆ 67% of adolescents who committed suicide between 1991 and 1993 used a gun obtained in their home.<sup>12</sup>

◆ 79% (13,820) of firearm suicide victims in 1997 were White males.<sup>13</sup>

Sources

1. U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1997.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999.
3. Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1995-96.
5. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.
6. Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999.
8. New England Journal of Medicine, 1992.
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996.
10. Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center.
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996.
12. Journal of Adolescent Health, March 2000 study of Colorado adolescents.
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997.

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