Your firearm counseling goal is to reduce risk. The most appropriate risk reduction strategies will vary from patient to patient and may differ for the same patient as his or her circumstances change. Ideally, you want to ensure that:

- Firearms are stored unloaded
- Firearms are secured with a locking device
- Ammunition is stored separately

If the firearms are not being stored safely, explore the appropriate actions the patient could take to reduce the risk of firearm injury or death to themselves, their family members, or anyone who visits their home.

When someone in the home is at risk of suicide or other harm, you can use the analogy of having a designated driver – when someone’s not safe to drive, it’s a good idea to have a trusted person take control of the keys until he or she is better.

Evaluate Risk | Evaluate the current circumstances to determine if having firearms in the home is right for everyone living there or visiting. Even visitors, like grandchildren, are at increased risk of firearm injury or death when they’re in a home with a firearm, particularly if the firearm is not safely stored.

Discuss Safe Storage | Ensure that your patient understands reasons for safe storage and handling practices for all firearms. In some states, you may want to remind them that they are legally responsible for keeping their firearms stored safely.

Discuss Alternative Firearm Storage | Discuss options for safe firearm storage outside of the patient’s home, such as gun ranges or retailers, especially when there is imminent risk.

Talk About Disposal of Firearms | You should talk about how to safely dispose of any unwanted firearms.

Suggest Firearm Safety Training | You can recommend that the patient take a course or attend training on firearm safety.

Discuss Other Risk Factors | As needed, explore how to reduce other risk factors for firearm injury – for instance, reducing alcohol or substance use.