

Firearm Injury Prevention: Special Considerations for Patients with Dementia

Corey Nichols-Hadeed, JD
Jennifer C. West, PhD

Department of Psychiatry

1

MEDICINE *of*
THE HIGHEST ORDER



STRONG
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Today's Agenda

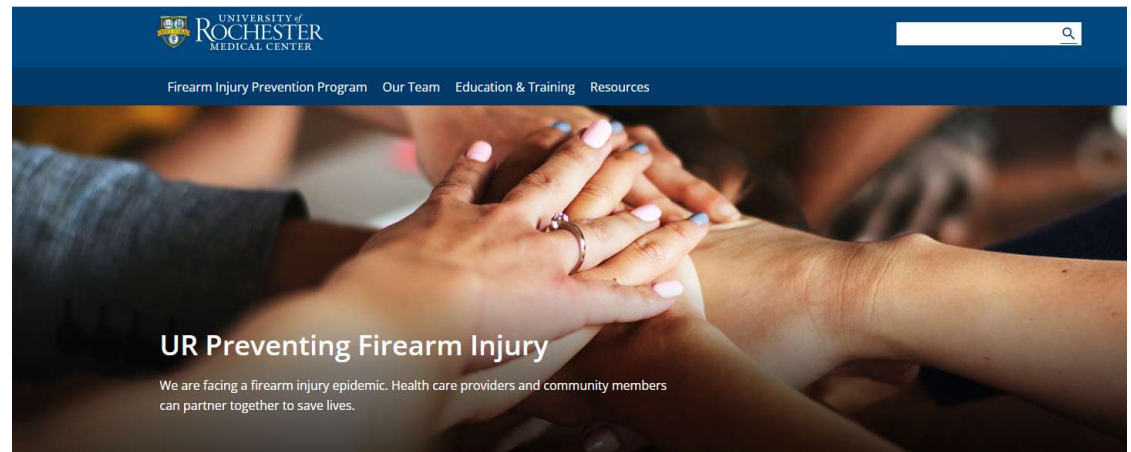
- Overview
- Legal Considerations
- Before Crisis: Resources & Tools for Planning
- What Can Professionals Do
- Q & A



URMC Firearm Injury Prevention Program (FIPP)

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/firearm-injury-prevention-program>

Mission: to collaborate with healthcare providers, community agencies, and community members in Rochester and the Finger Lakes region to find effective ways to prevent firearm-related suicide, unintentional injury and death, assaults and homicides through education, resource-sharing and open dialogue.



5

MEDICINE *of*
THE HIGHEST ORDER



The FIPP Team aims to:

1

Promote secure firearm storage to prevent suicide, unintentional injury and death, homicide and assault, and firearm theft.

2

Provide healthcare providers with training, resources, and tools on effective firearm storage counseling and intervention for individuals at risk of firearm-related harm.

3

Provide community members with education and resources on safely storing firearms and reducing risk.

4

Encourage open discussions about responsible firearm ownership among friends, family, and neighbors, providing resources and advice.

5

Partner with community agencies that focus on violence prevention and intervention to strengthen resource connections during and after hospital stays.

FIPP Resources:

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/firearm-injury-prevention-program/resources>



Increased Risk of Firearm Injury as We Age

Aging is a natural part of life that brings many changes and can sometimes increase our risk of injury. Approaching these changes with care and understanding can help make transitions easier for our loved ones and those who care for them.

Check out our Firearms Injury Prevention Resource Library



SCAN NOW

Contact Us
(585) 276-8605
FIPP.URMC.edu



Mental Health & Wellness

Firearm Injury Prevention for Caregivers of Older Adults



Changes that may increase the risk of injury

Mental Abilities
Changes in thinking skills, like memory, can make it harder to remember where guns are stored or if they are unloaded.

Feelings
Changes in mood, such as becoming more easily irritated, paranoia (feeling overly suspicious), or depression, can affect how you behave.

Physical Abilities
Changes like poor vision, slower reactions, and shaky hands can make handling firearms more challenging.





Create a Plan for Firearms

Safe Storage

- Keep firearms unloaded.
- Lock them up securely.
- Store bullets or gun cartridges separately.

List of Guns and Where They Are Kept

- It can be helpful to create a document with details about each firearm, where it's stored, how to access it (like a key or combination), and what you'd like to happen to it in the future. This can give everyone peace of mind.
- You can find an easy-to-use sample plan at firearmlifeplan.org.

Getting Rid of Guns Safely

- If you no longer want a firearm, you can call your local police department to help safely remove it.
- Firearms can also be transferred or sold to authorized gun sellers or trusted family members.

How to Talk with Your Loved One About Firearm Safety
Discussing firearm safety shows your care and concern for their well-being. These conversations can lead to positive outcomes, ensuring their safety and the safety of you and other loved ones, including children.

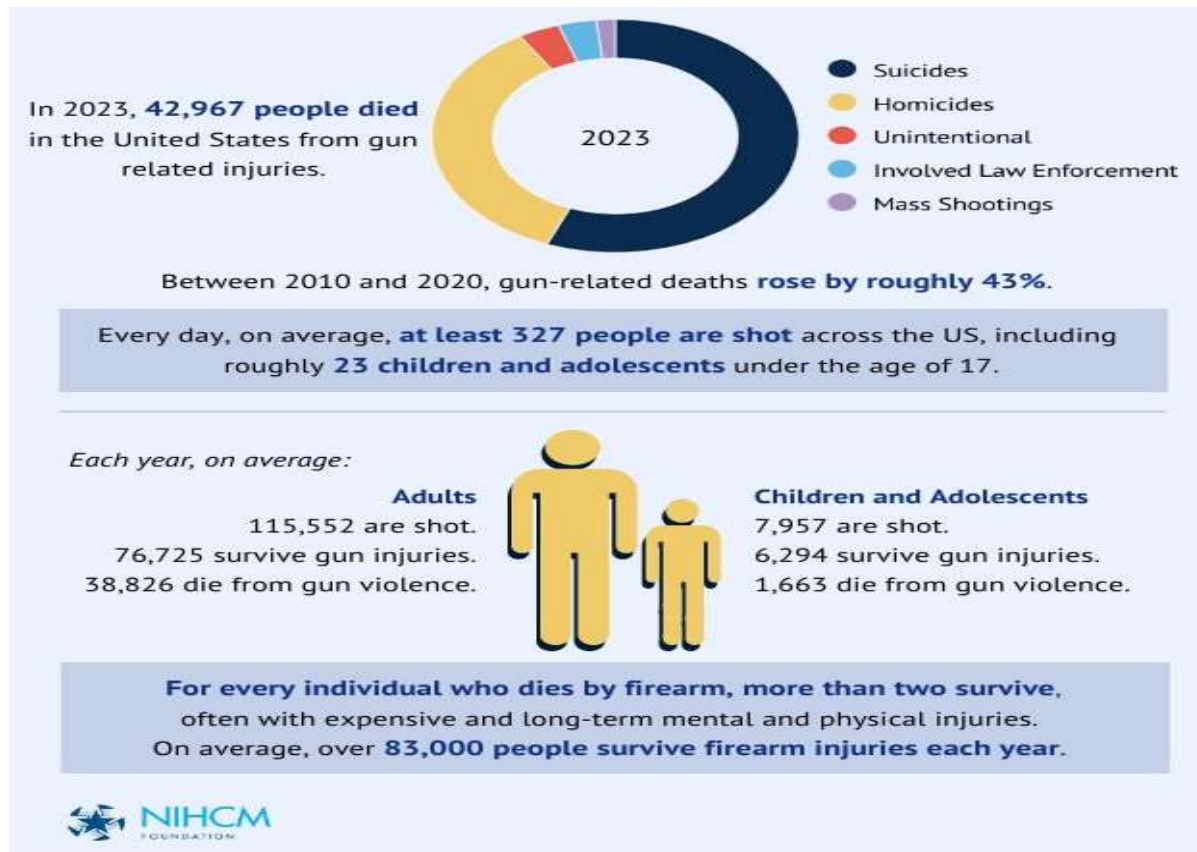
Phrases to help get you started:

"Do you have a plan for your firearms as you get older? I'd love to help you with this."

"I've noticed you don't seem to use your firearms much anymore. What would you like to do with them?"

"You've always been so good at keeping us safe. I'd like to talk with you about how we can make sure you stay safe too."

Firearm Injury is a Serious Public Health Concern



<https://nihcm.org/publications/gun-violence-the-impact-on-society>

MEDICINE of
THE HIGHEST ORDER



Many Americans live in the presence of firearms

40% reside in households where 1+ firearms are present (Miller et al., 2021)

29% of Americans identify as gun owners (Miller et al., 2021)

60% of guns owned by only 20% of the owners (Azrael et al., 2017)

Most firearm owners identify as men (63%), non-Hispanic white (73%), married with some college education (Miller et al., 2021)

Veterans are twice as likely to own firearms (Cleveland et al., 2017)

Who owns firearms?

Demographics may be changing (Miller et al., 2021)

- 7.5 million Americans became new firearm owners between Jan of 2019 and April of 2021
 - 48% identify as women
 - 21% identify as non-Hispanic Black
 - 19% identify as Hispanic



Older Adults, Dementia & Firearms

- More likely than other age groups to have a gun in their home (Hepburn et al., 2007)
- Most older adults who own firearms do not have a plan in place for the future of their firearms, such as securing, removing or legally transferring firearms should cognitive or physical impairment occur (Betz et al., 2021)
- Up to 60% of patients with dementia live in homes with firearms, with half of those stored loaded (Spangenberg et al., 1999)
 - Those with changes in mood, judgment, and/or personality and/or paranoia may be at higher risk of harm to self and others (Betz et al., 2018)
- Substance use increases risk (Kester, 2023)
- Persons recently diagnosed with dementia at increased risk for suicide (Gunak et al., 2021)
- Most persons with dementia are open to counseling on firearm safety but few receive it (Betz et al., 2020)

Firearms are the leading cause of death for children in the US (CDC, 2024)

- In 2023, 400 children unintentionally shot themselves or someone else (8 each day) (Everytown)
- Firearm suicides account for 1/3 of gun deaths and nearly half of suicides in youth (Everytown, 2022)
- Most firearm suicides and school shootings by youth are with a gun owned by a family member (Barber et al., 2022; Klein et al., 2023)
- 85% of children aged infant-12 killed by a firearm are killed in their own home (Fowler et al, 2017)
- Eight children (aged 0-17) are unintentionally shot each day due to an improperly stored or misused gun in their home (Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project)
- Playing with a firearm is the leading cause of unintentional firearm injury in children (Wilson et al., 2023)



Firearm Storage and Children

Hiding firearms is ineffective

- One study found that 75% of children know where firearms are stored (Baxley & Miller, 2006)
- Over a third of adolescents reported that they could access a loaded gun in their home in less than five minutes (Salhi, Azrael & Miller, 2021)

Telling children not to touch or play with firearms is not a replacement for secure storage practices

- It is estimated that between 72-135 firearm deaths in youth and between 235 and 323 youth firearm shootings would be prevented if 20% of households locked all guns (Monuteaux et al., 2019)

Children cannot distinguish between loaded and unloaded guns or real vs toy guns

Children as young as age 3 strong enough to pull trigger (Naurekas et al., 1995)



Opportunity: Responsible Firearm Ownership is a Modifiable Risk Factor

- Less than half of gun owners report safe storage of all their weapons (Anestis et al, 2023)
- Every two minutes a firearm is stolen and then often enters the illegal market and is used in violent crimes (Fabio et al., 2016; Freskos, 2017; Giffords Center)
- Studies show most providers have not received training, lack knowledge and confidence (Puttagunta, 2016; Roszko et al., 2015)
- Training of providers results in increased positive attitude toward assessment and counseling by 91% (Slovak & Brewer, 2010)
- Patients who reported owning a gun and received verbal or written lethal means safety recommendations were 3x more likely to make improvements in firearm storage

(Albright & Burge, 2003)



12

Responsibility as Common Ground Report by Alter Agents and Gun Safety Alliance

Special thanks to Ms. Devora Rogers, Chief Strategy Officer, Alter Agents

Gun Safety Statements

 Gun Owner  Non-Gun Owner

Gun safety is the responsibility of all gun owners



Image 1.

"How much do you agree with each of the following statements?"

Base: Total Respondents (n=3011), January 14-21st, 2022.

Agreement with Statements

	Gun Owner (n=2011)	Non-Gun Owner (n=1000)
Some Americans should not be able to own guns if they are violent or mentally unstable	90%	89%
Gun owners must be responsible for the safety of their guns	96%	92%
Gun owners must be responsible for preventing their guns from getting into the wrong hands	94%	91%

Table 1. "How much do you agree with each of the following statements?"
Base: Total Respondents (n=3011), Jan 14-21st, 2022.

NYS Firearm Law Resources

N.Y. Penal Law § 400.00 Licensing and other provisions relating to firearms

<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/400.00>

New York State Police: Firearms:

<https://troopers.ny.gov/firearms>

Everytown Gun Law Navigator (Federal and State Laws)

<https://maps.everytownresearch.org/navigator/>

The National Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)

Resource Center, New York:

<https://erpo.org/state/new-york/#state-resources>



- Check dates:
Make sure you are looking at the most recent law
- States have different laws
- Check if your organization has an ERPO policy

New York State Storage Laws

In home where anyone younger than 18 years old or anyone who is prohibited from possessing a gun resides, all firearms, rifles, and shotguns not in your immediate control must either be:

- Secured with a gun locking device (trigger lock or cable lock)
- Locked securely in a safe or secure container that is fire-impact-tamper resistant and locked using a key, keypad, or combination

Unattended firearms in a vehicle must be unloaded and locked in a fire-impact-tamper resistant storage device hidden from view.

- 200-500,000 guns stolen in the U.S. per year; half from vehicles
- Majority of gun-related homicides and assaults involve illegal, often stolen, guns

Firearm Transfer

- All private handgun, rifle or shotgun sales or transfers (with the exception of those sales or transfers to and between certain family members) require a background check of the buyer.
 - Pistol sales or transfers to and between spouses, domestic partners, adult children and step-children, are exempt from the private sale/transfer provision.
 - Other options include gun shops, sheriff departments, shooting ranges.
 - Plan before crisis: If occurs after death/ incapacitation or in crisis, there will be a 1-year window to transfer the pistol.
- Monroe County Clerk's Office: <https://www.monroecounty.gov/pistols-transfer-family>
- Pistol Permit Information: <https://www.monroecounty.gov/pistols>

Tools to Help: Gun Trust of Firearm Life Plan

Creating a clear plan of how guns should be treated if the current owner/possessor moved into institutional care, moves in with a friend/family member, becomes incapacitated or dies.

<https://firearmlifeplan.org/>

WARNING SIGNS AND ASSESSMENTS.....
CONVERSATION STARTERS.....
BUILD YOUR FIREARM LIFE PLAN.....
SAMPLE FIREARM INVENTORY.....
YOUR FIREARM INVENTORY.....
LEGACY MAP.....

FIREARM
LIFE•PLAN 

RESOURCES FROM THE FIREARM LIFE PLAN PROJECT

*Everything you'll
need to make a plan
for your firearms
that's right for you
and those you trust.*



Firearm Life Plan | © 2024 The Regents of the University of Colorado

MEDICINE of
THE HIGHEST ORDER



STRONG
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

What Can Healthcare Providers Do?

MEDICINE *of*
THE HIGHEST ORDER



UR
MEDICINE

STRONG
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Conversations about Firearms

How to Counsel: [Episode 3 - How to Counsel - BulletPoints Project](#)

3 As Framework (Bullet Points Project)

- Approach
- Assess
- Act

Dementia and Firearms:

<https://www.bulletpointsproject.org/dementia/>



Photo from BulletPoints Project

3A Framework: Approach

Use of language that is neutral, non-stigmatizing, technically correct

- Being explicit about “preventing,” “reducing harm” or “reducing access”
- Using language, when indicated, that conveys time-limited nature of the plan

Be mindful of and responsive to emotions that may arise (for patient/family members)

- Fear of being stigmatized due to age (ageism)
- Feelings related to decreased independence
- Concerns about mortality
- Concerns that collaborating to address firearm concern may damage the relationship

3A Framework: Approach

Demonstrate cultural humility

- Communicating appreciation that owning a firearm may be important to the person's identity

Why do people own firearms?

- Hunting
- Recreation
- Job-related
- Investment/collection
- Family tradition
- Inherited
- Protection (from other people, wildlife)



3As Framework: Approach

Approach

- Frame conversation in terms of risk/harm reduction
 - Shared interests of overall health, safety and well-being of patient and those in their household
 - Suggest steps toward reduced risk
 - Reducing some risk is better than reducing none
 - Safer, not safest, may be the result
- Person may be willing to take further steps in the future

3As Framework: Approach

Be informed

- About why people own firearms
- Basics of firearms
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPPoEyLPGf4>
- Safer storage options
- Local policies (temporary transfer laws, civil protective orders)
 - <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/state/new-york/>

3As Framework: Assess

Access to guns

- Asking in context of risk factors, health, safety
 - Informing patient what risk(s) concerned about
- Can assume they have firearms in the home or directly ask
 - Many individuals I work with have guns in their home and I talk to them each about how to ensure that those at risk of misusing them or causing harm with them cannot access them. What steps are you taking?
- In some situations, you should also ask if the person is planning to acquire a firearm

3As Framework: Assess

Access to guns

- Ask about all guns
- Location of guns
- How they are stored
 - Loaded/unloaded
 - Locked/unlocked
 - Ammunition (stored in separate location or with firearm)



3As Framework: Assess



Patient's ability and willingness to collaborate to reduce risk

- May need to involve loved ones
- If person is unwilling to collaborate and is at imminent risk of harming self or others, may need to use involuntary actions

3As Framework: Assess

Responding to reluctance to discuss firearms, safe storage

- Respectfully emphasize why access to firearms is a clinical concern
- Re-emphasize goal: keeping patient and/or others safe
- Respectfully explore factors underlying reluctance to answer, engage
- Provide resources about safer firearm storage
- Can defer discussion to subsequent visit (if there is no emergent risk)

3As Framework: Act



Dependent on level of risk

- Safer storage
- Temporary transfer
- Mental health hold
- Civil protective orders

<https://www.bulletpointsproject.org/resource/episode-4-safe-storage/>



Gun Case

For home or in-transit storage of one firearm. Uses external lock **\$10-\$150**

Prevents access by children
Prevents access by unauthorized users Enables fast access



Trigger Lock

Locks trigger of single weapon. Never use with loaded gun. May be dismantled with minimal tools and skills, so not as effective with older children and teens.

\$10-\$75

Prevents use by small children
Enables fast access



Cable Lock

Cable runs through action of single weapon to prevent firing. Ammunition must be removed for lock use. May be dismantled with minimal tools and skills, so not as effective with older children and teens.

\$0 -\$50

Prevents use by small children
Enables fast access
*Often provided free with firearm purchase.

SMART

MEDICINE of
THE HIGHEST ORDER

UR | **STRONG**
MEDICINE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL



Full-Size Gun Safe

Storage of multiple guns in one place. Biometric lock more secure than key or passcode.

\$200-\$2,000

Prevents access by children
Prevents access by unauthorized users
Prevents theft (if secured to a structure in home)
Enables fast access



Lock Box/Locker

Smaller and lighter than safe. Biometric lock more secure than key or passcode.

\$25-\$350

Prevents access by children
Prevents access by unauthorized users
Provides secure vehicle storage
Enables fast access



Console/Vehicle Gun Safe

For storage in a vehicle. Biometric lock more secure than key or passcode.

\$50-\$350

Prevents access by children
Prevents access by unauthorized users
Prevents theft (if secured to a structure in car)
Provides secure vehicle storage
Enables fast access



MEDICINE of
THE HIGHEST ORDER




Case Study 1: Clip 1

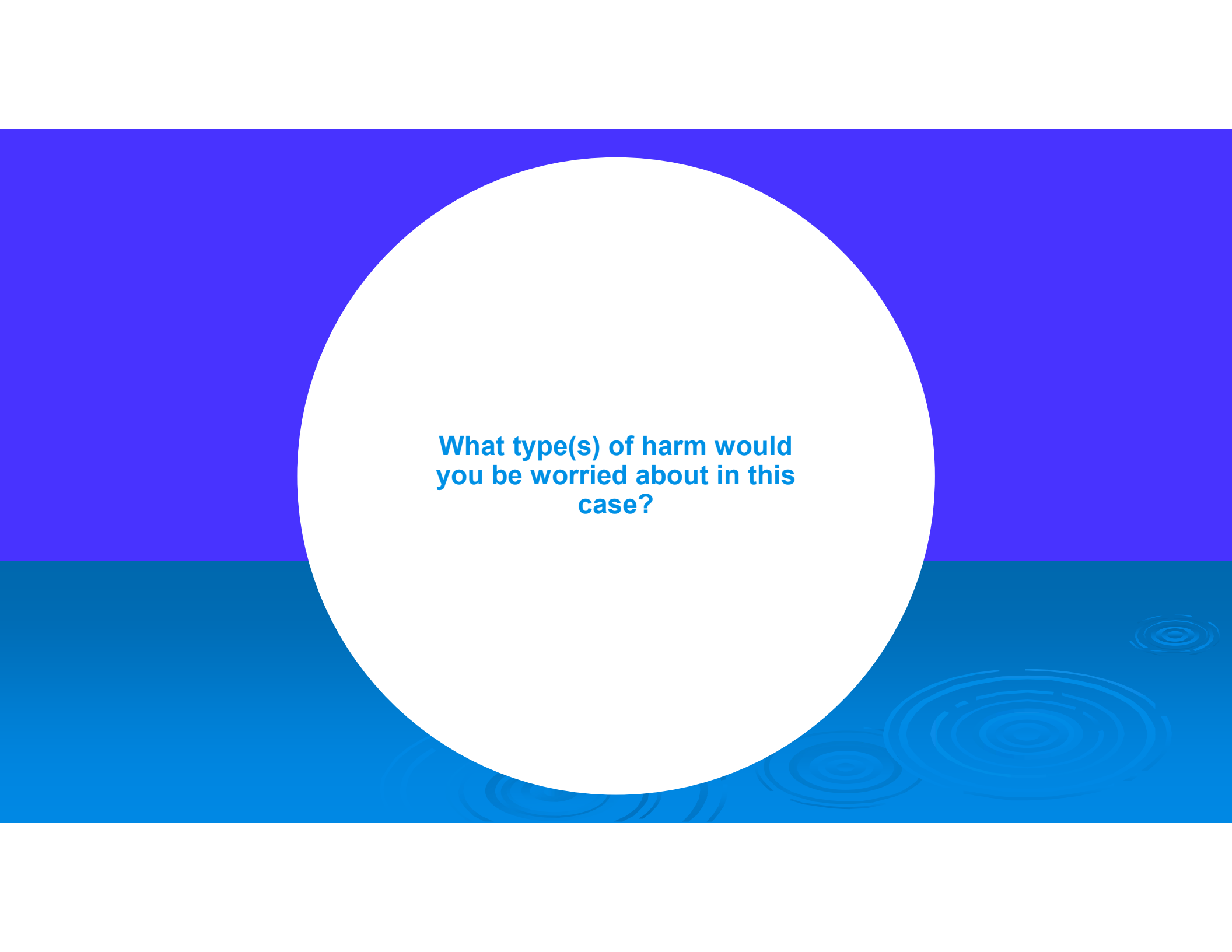


The background is split horizontally into two shades of blue. The top half is a vibrant, solid blue. The bottom half is a darker blue and features several concentric white circles of varying sizes, creating a ripple effect on water. A large, solid white circle is centered on the page, overlapping both the top and bottom blue sections. Inside this white circle, the text "What risk factors are present here?" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.


**What risk factors are
present here?**

The background is split horizontally into two shades of blue. The top half is a vibrant, solid blue. The bottom half is a darker blue and features several concentric white circles of varying sizes, creating a ripple effect on water. A large, perfectly white circle is centered on the page, overlapping both the top and bottom blue sections. Inside this white circle, there is text in a blue, sans-serif font.

**On a scale from
no risk (0) to very high risk (10),
how would you rate the level of risk
in this case?**

The background is split horizontally into two shades of blue. The top half is a vibrant, solid blue. The bottom half is a darker blue and features several concentric white circles of varying sizes, creating a ripple effect on water. A large, perfectly white circle is centered on the page, overlapping both the top and bottom blue sections. Inside this white circle, the text is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.


**What type(s) of harm would
you be worried about in this
case?**

The background is a solid blue color. A large white circle is centered on the page. At the bottom of the image, there are several concentric circles representing ripples in water, with the largest ripple centered under the white circle.

**If you were in Dr. Smith's shoes,
how would you ask Jeff
about firearms?**

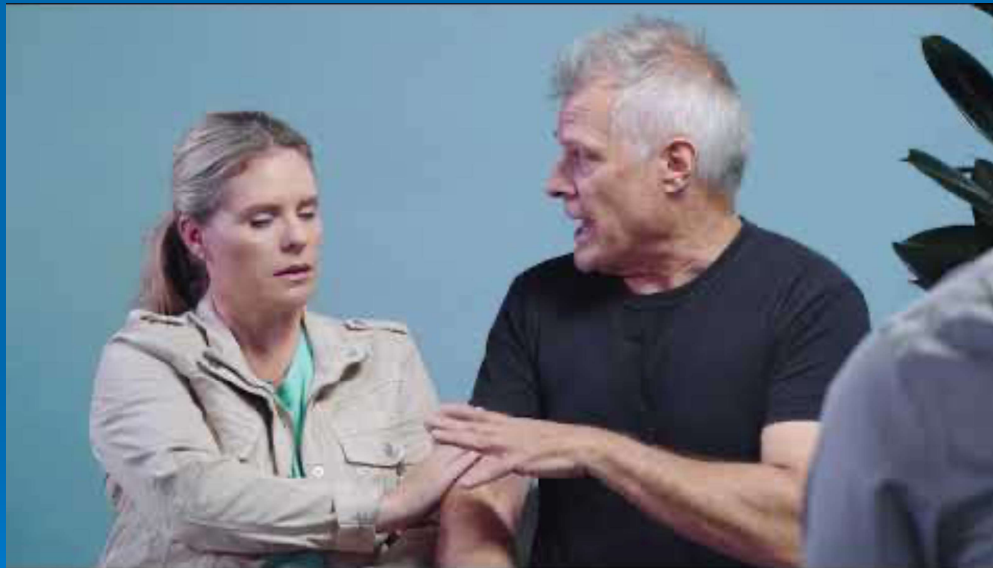
Case Study 1: Clip 2

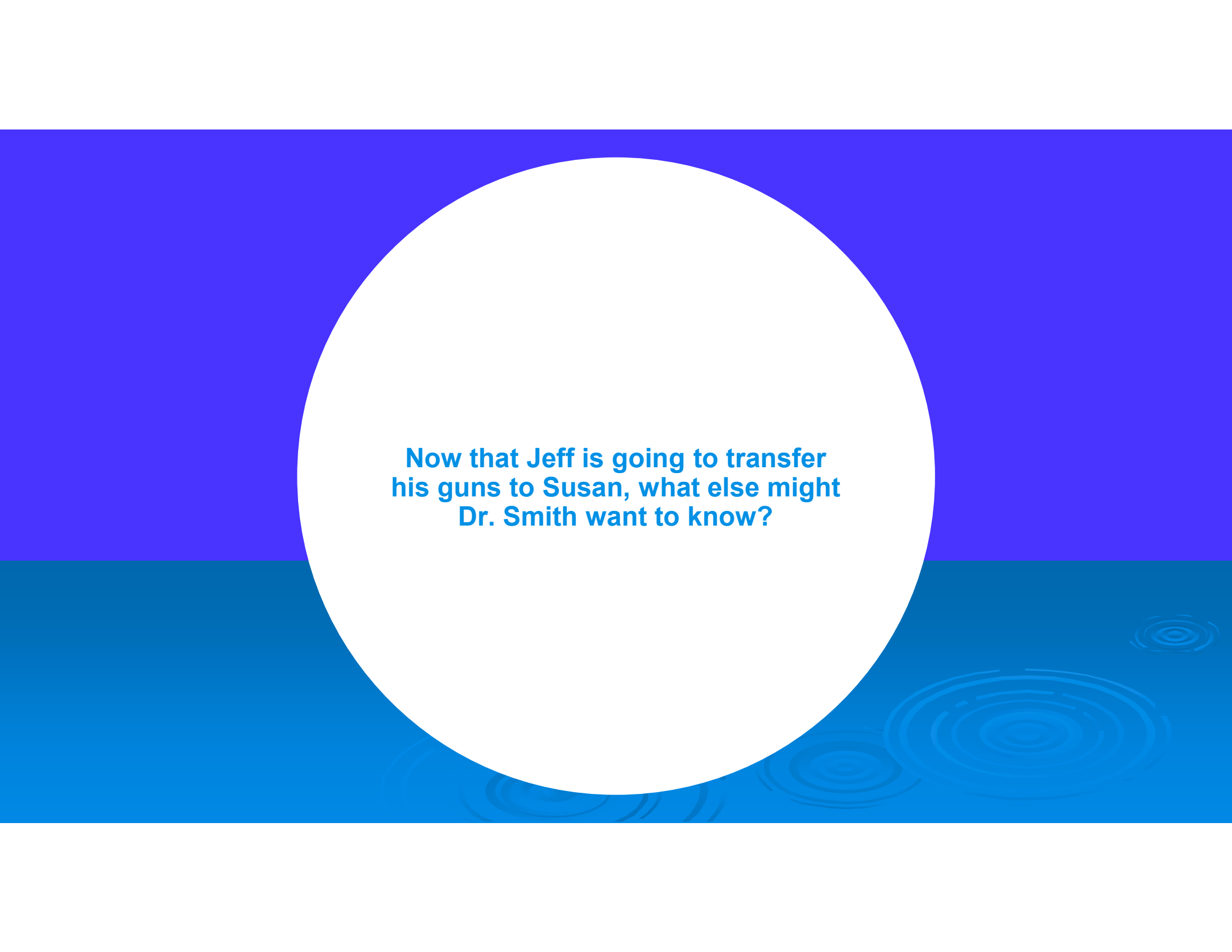


The background is a solid blue color. A large white circle is centered on the page. At the bottom of the image, there are several concentric circles representing ripples in water, with the largest ripple centered under the white circle.

**If you were in Dr. Smith's shoes,
what would you do to reduce the risk
of firearm injury?**

Case Study 1: Clip 3



The background is split horizontally into two shades of blue. The top half is a vibrant royal blue, and the bottom half is a slightly darker, teal-like blue. In the bottom right corner of the teal section, there are several concentric white circles of varying sizes, creating a ripple effect on water. A large, solid white circle is centered on the page, overlapping both the blue sections. Inside this white circle, the following text is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font:

**Now that Jeff is going to transfer
his guns to Susan, what else might
Dr. Smith want to know?**

Asking about firearms and **collaborating** with individuals and their family members to develop a safe plan can save lives and prevent physical and emotional suffering

Questions?



MEDICINE *of*
THE HIGHEST ORDER

