

Focus Group Facilitator Guides and Questions for Instructors and Staff in Early Military Career Settings and Mid-Senior Leadership

Facilitator Guide and Questions for Early Military Career Setting Focus Groups

Hello everyone. Thank you for meeting with us today. My name is [facilitator name], and this is [note taker]. We are from Peraton, a DoD contractor, and we are conducting a study sponsored by the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, or DSPO, in partnership with the Defense Personnel Assessment Center, or DPAC. Joining us today are [other attendees/affiliation].

We are exploring opportunities to encourage Service members to store personal firearms securely early in their careers, in a way that avoids misuse, accidental discharge, self-inflicted injuries, and suicide. Similar to how Service members learn about personal and professional safety, such as seatbelt safety and what to do when there is a fire, we want them to learn how to securely store firearms as well. You may be wondering why this is important, and why we are talking to you about this topic, so we want to provide some background:

- Research shows that when people have easy access to potentially lethal means, such as firearms, they are more likely to die by suicide or accidents.
- Research also shows that securing and safely storing firearms can prevent suicide and other bad outcomes.

I want to mention a couple other points that may help everyone see how secure firearm storage can prevent death and injury:

- It can be helpful to think of waves on the ocean. For many people, thoughts of wanting to harm themselves or others can come on very quickly, and very intensely, meaning that if someone has access to a lethal object such as a firearm, they may be more likely to use it.
- These same thoughts that come on so quickly can also go away quickly – like a passing wave. When it comes to preventing death or injury, every single second counts. Even a few seconds of delay can provide opportunity for saving someone’s life.
- This means steps like securing firearms with a cable or trigger lock, or keeping firearms securely stored, can provide enough time for someone to ride out these intense waves of emotion, and then reconsider and seek help.
- Another important point to keep in mind is that people don’t usually substitute one potential method of death for another. This is a common myth. It is uncommon for people to seek out some other method, and even when they do, those alternative methods are unlikely to be as potentially fatal as a firearm, so there is greater likelihood to save a person’s life and get them the help they need.

There is already a strong culture of firearms safety and risk management within the military, but there may be some missed opportunities to do even more to reach Service members early, as they begin their military careers. Our goal is to explore whether it is possible to use current early-career training to help young Service members understand the value of adopting secure firearm storage practices when they are on and off duty, both now and in the future.

Today I am going to ask you some questions about how we can encourage Service members to keep their duty and off-duty firearms secure when not in use. This discussion is going to take 90 minutes. The feedback you provide will help inform strategies for encouraging secure firearm

storage practices among early military career Service members in all aspects of their lives. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers, and you can decide not to answer any or all of our questions.

To respect the privacy of everyone in this group, and to make sure everyone feels comfortable providing honest feedback, we ask that you please do not disclose to people outside of this focus group the names of other participants or specifics about what we discuss.

Please note that the information that you share with us today will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. But if you tell me that you or someone else is in immediate danger, I'll need to reach out for help to ensure everyone's safety. We will not share our notes with the Services. Answers you provide will be combined with those from other focus groups for a final report to each Service. In that report, nothing you say will be linked with your name or any other information that could reveal your identity. We will write things like, "Personnel in _____ [Service and setting] recommended X, Y, and Z."

[IN PERSON FOCUS GROUPS] I am passing out a copy of the information we just discussed for you to keep. If you have any questions after today about this study or how your responses will be used, you can contact the project director, Dr. Olga Shechter, or the study sponsor, DSPO. Their phone numbers are listed in this document.

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Do I have everyone's permission to begin the focus group?

[FOR VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUPS] We are emailing a copy of the information we just discussed for you to keep. If you have any questions after today about this study or how your responses will be used, you can contact the project director, Dr. Olga Shechter, or the study sponsor, DSPO. Their phone numbers are listed in the document we are emailing.

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Is everyone okay with me turning on the recorder? Please type your response into the chat or say yes if you are on the phone. (If everyone agrees, begin recording.)

Do I have everyone's permission to begin the focus group? Please type your response into the chat or say yes if you are on the phone.

A. Introductions and Icebreaker

Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves.

1. Tell us what your job here is and who is someone who has influenced you the most in your career when it comes to safety? What did you learn from them?

Prompt: if you know that all participants have direct experience with firearms safety, then ask "...and who is someone who has influenced you the most in your career when it comes to firearms safety?"

We have a great group of folks gathered here! Let's dive into our questions.

B. Current Training

Our questions are broken up into several categories. To start, we want to learn a little bit more about what type of training takes place here and get your input on how students respond to this training.

2. Do students receive firearms training here at [site]?

If yes:

3. At what point in the training cycle are students first introduced to firearm safety training here at [site]?

4. Who leads firearm safety training?

Prompt: Are the people leading safety training the same ones who teach and supervise the actual firearms training on the range?

5. How long does firearm safety training last?

6. How often is firearm safety training repeated?

Prompt: For example, are safety briefs repeated each time Service members conduct practice on a range, or are there other times firearm safety training is repeated?

7. Where does firearm safety training take place?

Prompt: Does it take place in the classroom, on the range, or somewhere else?

8. What safety practices are covered during this training?

Prompt: Do you have any course materials or course info that you can share with me?

9. What is the format for this training?

Prompt: Is it a group format, instructor-led, discussion, demonstration, asynchronous web-based training, something else?

10. What memory or mnemonic devices do instructors use to help students remember firearm safety principles?

11. How receptive are students to firearm safety training?

Prompt: Do students seem to take it seriously, or do you feel they have a different reaction to this training?

Prompt: What could help make students more receptive to this training?

12. How do instructors reinforce the safety principles to make them stick?
13. Does the current training around safe handling of firearms include a component related to secure firearm storage?

Prompt (if yes): Please describe what is covered regarding securing or storing firearms.

Prompt (if yes): Does the current training address secure storage of personal firearms?

14. Are you familiar with any other training in the [Service] around safe handling of firearms that already includes a component related to secure firearm storage?

Prompt (if yes): Please describe what is covered regarding securing or storing firearms.

15. Are you familiar with any programs or training offered in the [Service] that includes demonstrations and hands-on practice using secure storage devices for firearms?

Prompt: For example, training on how to use cable locks on a variety of firearms, such as pistols, rifles, and shotguns.

16. Are secure storage devices for firearms available in this setting (like trigger locks, cable locks, lock boxes, and safes) for Service members to use with their Service firearms?

Prompt (if yes): When do they use them?

17. Are secure storage devices for firearms (like trigger locks, cable locks, lock boxes, and safes) available here at [site] for [Service members] to keep for their personal use?

Prompt (if yes): How are these devices made available?

Prompt: Who teaches [Service members] how to use them?

Now let's discuss suicide prevention training.

18. Do students receive suicide prevention training here at [site]?

If yes:

19. At what point in the training cycle are students first introduced to suicide prevention training here at [site]?

20. Who leads suicide prevention training?

21. How long does suicide prevention training last?

22. How often is suicide prevention training repeated?

23. What basic learning objectives are covered during this training?

Prompt: Do you have any course materials or course info that you can share with me?

24. Is secure firearm storage discussed during suicide prevention training?

Prompt: If yes, what kind of information is shared?

25. What is the format of the suicide prevention training?

Prompt: Is it a group format, instructor-led, discussion, asynchronous web-based training, something else?

My next few questions are about risk management training.

26. Do students receive risk management training here at [site]?

If yes:

27. At what point in the training cycle are students first introduced to risk management training here at [site]?

28. Who leads risk management training?

29. How long does risk management training last?

30. How often is risk management training repeated?

31. Where does this risk management training take place?

32. What basic learning objectives are covered during this training?

Prompt: Do you have any course materials or course info that you can share with me?

33. What is the format for this training?

Prompt: Is it a group format, instructor-led, discussion, asynchronous web-based training, something else?

C. Optimal Settings

Our first few questions focus on the optimal settings for educating Service members during their early military career training about securing firearms when they are on and off duty, both now and in the future.

34. At what points in a [Service member's] career should information about secure firearm storage be addressed? As you think about your answer, remember that we want to encourage Service members to secure firearms when they are on and off duty, both now and in the future.

Prompt respondents to be as specific as possible (e.g., when they are in boot camp, or when they start at their first duty station, or when they are deploying...)

Prompt: What makes this a good setting? (Prompt respondents to be as specific as possible (e.g., because it can be discussed at firearm qualification ranges while waiting in line, but not command indoctrination/orientation because of this reason...)).

35. What do you think about incorporating information about secure firearm storage here at [site]?

Prompt: Where would it work best to discuss it?

36. Are there specific early career training settings where discussions about securing firearms do not seem to fit?

Prompt: If so, where and what makes these settings a poor fit?

37. What are your thoughts on incorporating information about secure firearm storage into existing training?

Prompt: Which training(s) do you recommend incorporating the information into?

38. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?

39. (For Army and Air Force) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

D. Optimal Messengers

The next questions focus on who should talk to [Service members] about how to store their on duty and off duty firearms securely.

40. Please give me some examples of staff here at [site] whom early career Service members seem to look up to and who you think should educate them about this topic, and I'm going to make a list. *[If in person: Write down the examples on the board; if virtual: type examples on the screen. Offer the following prompts if none are generated:*

Prompt: For instance, what do you think about military leaders, such as NCOs/Staff NCOs, frontline supervisors, or peers, and recent graduates of the [site]?

Prompt: [If continued silence] What do you think of recruiters, instructors, chaplains, suicide prevention program managers/violence prevention integrators, firearms instructors, firearms retailers, security forces, military police, or local law enforcement as role models for Service members?

41. Why do you think these individuals would be effective messengers when it comes on delivering information about secure storage of firearms?

42. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?

43. (For Army and Air Force) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

E. Receptivity of Early Career Service Members

The next set of questions focus on Service members' receptiveness to messaging about-secure-firearms storage, both on and off duty, and how they can internalize and practice secure firearm storage now and in the future.

44. How receptive would Service members at [site] be to messaging about secure firearm storage?

Prompt: Why or why not?

Prompt (if not receptive): What could help make [Service members] more receptive to learning about this topic and making secure firearm storage part of their life?

45. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?

46. (For Army and Air Force) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

F. Optimal Method of Delivery

The next questions focus on methods for educating Service members about secure firearms storage practices both on and off duty.

47. *[Display the 10 Rules of Safe Gun Handling promoted by NSSF on the screen].*

The National Shooting Sports Foundation offers 10 principles of safe firearm handling that you can see here on the screen. One of them is to keep firearms unloaded when not in use. Our goal is to create a new list of principles to help convey the importance of secure firearm storage, both on and off duty. What secure firearm storage principles can you think of that should be included in this list? *[Highlight principles that get mentioned by respondents. After finalizing the list, if in person, write the new list on the board, if virtual, display new list on screen.]*

48. What would be the best way to convey information to Service members at [site] about secure firearm storage on and off duty to make sure they take it seriously?

Prompt: Briefings, trainings, conversations, discussion groups, demonstrations of how to secure different firearms, personal disclosure by staff about their own secure storage, etc.

49. We also want to reinforce this information through messaging opportunities outside of training. What would be the best ways to help [Service members] here at [site] embrace a culture of safety that includes secure firearm storage? *[Offer these prompts if no suggestions are made: strategic placement of posters, flyers, videos, social media posts, visual aids, conversations, etc.]*

50. What memory or mnemonic devices do firearms instructors use to help students remember firearm safety principles?

Offer this prompt if no suggestions are made:

- *For example, some firearms instructors may use “Treat, Never, Keep, Keep.” It stands for “Treat every weapon as if it were loaded. Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you're ready to fire.”*

51. What are your thoughts on adding secure firearm storage principles into existing mnemonic devices used during firearm safety briefs?

Prompt: Why do you think the principles would or would not fit into existing mnemonic devices?

52. Suppose safety training included demonstration on how to use cable locks and other devices and explained how these devices are compatible with a wide variety of firearms.

- a. How well would training or demonstrations of secure firearms storage fit or not fit somewhere into your existing firearms training? For example, demonstrations on how to clear and safe a variety of firearms, like rifles, shotguns, pistols, etc., and secure them with a cable lock.
- b. How would Service members respond to demonstrations and training for these devices?

53. How often should information about secure firearm storage be shared?

54. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?

55. *(For Army and Air Force)* What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

G. Opportunities Outside of Early-Career Training (only if time permits)

The next set of questions focuses on opportunities outside of early career training that can help reinforce the importance of securing firearms across a Service member's career, both on and off duty.

56. I'm going to list a few settings along the career trajectory, and I would like you to tell me how education and conversations about secure storage of firearms could or could not be addressed there.

[Note: Facilitator will ask about each setting and probe for detailed responses and reasons.]

- a. In-processing to new commands (e.g., orientation or check-in classes)?
- b. First duty station?
- c. Annual firearms qualification training?
- d. Other firearm training settings?
- e. Professional military education (PME) training?
- f. Resident PME training?
- g. Staff noncommissioned officer academies
- h. Field/general grade officer academies

57. Are there any other settings outside of early career training where education and conversations about secure storage should be included?

58. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?

59. (*For Army and Air Force*) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

H. Conclusion

60. Is there anything you want to add that I didn't ask?

If silence, continue with prompt: Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?

That concludes the questions I have today. I really appreciate all the different perspectives you have shared with us.

Are there any questions from the note taker?

Thank you very much for your time today. Your feedback is invaluable for this important project.

Facilitator Guide and Questions for Mid-Senior Leader Focus Groups

Hello everyone. Thank you for meeting with us today. My name is [facilitator name], and this is [note taker]. We are from Peraton, a DoD contractor, and we are conducting a study sponsored

by the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, or DSPO, in partnership with the Defense Personnel Assessment Center, or DPAC. Joining us today are [other attendees/affiliation].

We are exploring opportunities for how to encourage Service members to store personal firearms securely, in a way that avoids misuse, accidental discharge, self-inflicted injuries, and suicide. Similar to how Service members learn about personal and professional safety, such as seatbelt safety, and what to do when there is a fire, we want them to learn how to securely store firearms as well. You may be wondering why this is important, and why we are talking to you about this topic, so we want to provide some background:

- Research shows that when people have easy access to potentially lethal means, such as firearms, they are more likely to die by suicide or accidents.
- Research also shows that securing and safely storing firearms can prevent suicide and other bad outcomes.

I want to mention a couple other points that may help everyone see how secure firearm storage practices can prevent death and injury:

- It can be helpful to think of waves on the ocean. For many people, thoughts of wanting to harm themselves or others can come on very quickly, and very intensely, meaning that if someone has access to a lethal object, such as a firearm, they may be more likely to use it.
- These same thoughts that come on so quickly can also go away quickly – like a passing wave. When it comes to preventing death or injury, every single second counts. Even a few seconds of delay can provide opportunity for saving someone's life.
- This means steps like securing firearms with a cable or trigger lock, or keeping them securely stored, can provide enough time for someone to ride out these intense waves of emotion, and then reconsider and seek help.
- Another important point to keep in mind is that people don't usually substitute one potential method of death for another. This is a common myth. It is uncommon for people to seek out some other method, and even when they do, those alternative methods are unlikely to be as potentially fatal as a firearm, so there is greater likelihood to save a person's life and get them the help they need.

There is already a strong culture of firearms safety and risk management within the military, but there may be some missed opportunities to do even more. Today I am going to ask you some questions about potential opportunities, in training or elsewhere, to encourage Service members to keep their firearms securely stored when not in use, both on and off duty.

This discussion is going to take 90 minutes. The feedback you provide will help inform potential strategies for how to encourage secure firearm storage practices among Service members both on and off duty. There are no right or wrong answers and you can decide not to answer any or all of our questions.

To respect the privacy of everyone in this group, and to make sure everyone feels comfortable providing honest feedback, we ask that you please do not disclose to people outside of this focus group the names of other participants, or specifics about what we discuss.

Please note that the information that you share with us today will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. But if you tell me that you or someone else is in immediate danger, I'll need to reach out for help to ensure everyone's safety. We will not share our notes with the

Services. Answers you provide will be combined with those from other focus groups for a final report to each Service. In that report, nothing you say will be linked with your name, or any other information that could reveal your identity. We will write things like, “Personnel in _____ [Service and setting] recommended X, Y, and Z.”

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A. Introductions and Icebreaker

Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves.

1. Tell us what your job here is and who is someone who has influenced you the most in your career when it comes to safety? What did you learn from them?

Prompt: if you know that all participants have direct experience with firearms safety, then ask “...and who is someone who has influenced you the most in your career when it comes to firearms safety?”

We have a great group of folks gathered here! Let’s dive into our questions.

B. Current Training Opportunities

Our questions today are broken up into several categories. To start, we want to learn a little bit more about what type of training opportunities are already in place across [Service members'] careers, and how responsive they are to this training.

2. Firearms Safety Training

- a. When do [Service members], in your command, learn about principles of firearm safety?
- b. What basic learning objectives are covered during firearm safety training? Is it consistent across the Service?
- c. How well does the current safety training seem to influence Service members? What would make the current safety training more impactful, from your perspective?
- d. How are safety principles reinforced to make them stick?

3. Are you familiar with any training in the [Service] around safe handling of firearms that already includes a component related to secure storage of personal firearms? If so, can you describe what is covered regarding securing or storing firearms?

4. Are you familiar with any programs, or training offered in the [Service] that already includes demonstrations and hands on practice using use secure storage devices for firearms? For example, training on how to use cable locks on a variety of firearms such as pistols, rifles, shotguns, etc.

5. Are secure storage devices for firearms (i.e., trigger locks, cable locks, lock boxes, safes) available the settings where you work and train, for Service members to use with their Service firearms? When do they use them?

6. Are secure storage devices for firearms (i.e., trigger locks, cable locks, lock boxes, safes) available the settings where you work and train for Service members to keep for their personal use? How are these devices made available? Are [Service members] taught how to use them?

7. Suicide Prevention Training

- a. When do [Service members], in your command, learn about principles of suicide prevention?
- b. What basic learning objectives are covered during suicide prevention training? Is it consistent across the Service?
- c. Is secure firearm storage discussed during suicide prevention training?

Prompt: If yes, what kind of information is shared?

- d. Do you believe these trainings are impactful? What would make them more impactful, from your perspective?

8. Risk Management Training

- a. When do [Service members], in your command, learn about principles of risk management?

- b. What basic learning objectives are covered during risk management training? Is it consistent across the Service?
- c. Do you believe these trainings are impactful? What would make them more impactful, from your perspective?

C. Optimal Settings

The next set of questions focus on your ideas about optimal settings and timing for reinforcing the importance of securing firearms across a Service member's career, when they are both on and off duty.

9. Where could information about secure firearm storage be shared with [Service members]?
Prompt respondents to be as specific as possible (e.g., it can be discussed at firearm qualification ranges while waiting in line, orientation or check-in classes, annual firearms qualifications training, or other times throughout [Service members'] careers, but not command indoctrination/orientation because of this reason...).
10. Are there specific settings where discussions about securing duty and off-duty firearms do not seem to fit?
Prompt: If so, where and what makes these settings a poor fit?
11. What are your thoughts on incorporating information about duty and off-duty secure firearm storage into an existing training?
Prompt: Which training(s) do you recommend incorporating this information into?
12. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?
13. (For Army and Air Force) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

D. Optimal Messengers

The next questions focus on who should educate [Service members] about secure firearm storage, when they are on and off duty.

14. Please give me some examples of staff in the [Service] that Service members seem to look up to and who you think should educate them about secure firearms storage on and off duty, and I'm going to make a list. *[If in person: Write down the examples on the board; if virtual: type examples on the screen. Offer the following prompts if none are generated:*
Prompt: For instance, what do you think about military leaders, such as NCOs/Staff NCOs, frontline supervisors, or peers?
Prompt: [If continued silence] What do you think of recruiters, instructors, chaplains, suicide prevention program managers/violence prevention integrators, firearms instructors, firearms retailers, security forces, military police, or local law enforcement as candidates for this role?
15. Why do you think these individuals would be effective messengers when it comes on delivering information about secure storage of firearms?

16. How receptive would leaders at various levels, be to teaching or counseling their subordinates about secure firearms storage?
17. What role should leaders, particularly small unit leaders, have in reinforcing messaging around securing firearms?
Prompt: How can leaders affect [Service members'] attitudes and behaviors related to secure firearm storage?
18. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?
19. (For Army and Air Force) What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

E. Optimal Method of Delivery

The next questions focus on methods for educating Service members about secure firearms storage practices both on and off duty.

20. What would be the best way to convey to Service members information about secure firearm storage on and off duty to make sure they take it seriously?
Prompts: Briefings, trainings, conversations, discussion groups, demonstrations of how to secure different firearms, personal disclosure by staff about their own secure storage, etc.
21. We also want to reinforce this information through messaging opportunities outside of training. What would be the best ways to help [Service members] embrace a culture of safety that includes secure firearm storage? *[Offer these prompts if no suggestions are made: strategic placement of posters, flyers, videos, social media posts, visual aids, conversations, etc.]*
22. What memory or mnemonic devices do firearms instructors use to help students remember firearm safety principles?
Offer this prompt if no suggestions are made:
 - *For example, some firearms instructors may use “Treat, Never, Keep, Keep.” It stands for “Treat every weapon as if it were loaded. Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you're ready to fire.”*
23. What are your thoughts on adding secure firearm storage principles into existing mnemonic devices used during firearm safety briefs?
Prompt: Why do you think the principles would or would not fit into existing mnemonic devices?
24. How well would training or demonstrations of secure firearms storage fit or not fit somewhere into existing firearms training? For example, demonstrations on how to properly clear and make safe a variety of firearms, such as rifles, shotguns, pistols, and secure them with a cable lock.
Prompt: How would [Service members] respond to demonstrations and training for these devices?

Prompt: How receptive would [staff] be to conducting demonstrations and training for these devices?

25. How often should information about secure firearm storage should be shared?
26. What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the reserves?
27. *(For Army and Air Force)* What changes, if any, would you make to your responses if we were talking about Service members in the National Guard?

F. Conclusion

28. Is there anything you want to add that I didn't ask?

If silence, continue with prompt: Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?

That concludes the questions I have today. I really appreciate all the different perspectives you have shared with us.

Are there any questions from the note taker?

Thank you very much for your time today. Your feedback is invaluable for this important project.