

Gun Safety



Having a firearm in the home can be a significant risk factor for injury and death in children. The decision to keep a firearm in the home is very serious and one that should not be made lightly. If you choose to keep a gun you must become fully aware about the risks of firearms to your family and others who visit your home.

Although firearm related injuries peak in adolescence, they can affect younger children and infants as well. Younger children are most likely to be injured, either shooting themselves or a playmate, after playing with a gun that they found in the home, not realizing that the gun is real or that it's loaded.

It is estimated that there are guns in half the homes in the United States. Although most of these guns are purchased for safety reasons, a firearm at home is much more likely to injure or kill a family member or friend than an intruder.

Let's look at some statistics:

Firearm Deaths

- Every seven and a half hours a child or teen is killed by a gun by either accident or suicide.
- From 1995 to 2000 an average of 4 to 5 children died every day in non-homicide firearm incidents.
- From 1995 to 2000, more than 1,790 children were killed in firearm accidents.
- In each of the last 10 years an average of 1,323 kids committed suicide with a firearm; 155 were under 15 years of age.

Firearm Injuries

- In 2001, there were 14,571 kids injured by a firearm.
- In 2001, 13,572 kids were injured by BB/pellet guns.

Firearm Ownership

- 40% of American households have guns
- 34% of children in American homes live in homes with at least one firearm

Storage Practices

- Among homes with children and firearms
 - ✓ 28% do not always keep guns locked in a secure place
 - ✓ 25% only "occasionally" lock and store the bullets separate from the gun
 - ✓ 48% do not regularly make sure that guns are equipped with child safety and trigger locks
 - ✓ In 30% of hand gun owning homes, the gun was stored unlocked and loaded at the time of the survey

Accessibility

- In 72% of unintentional deaths and injuries, suicide and suicide attempts, the firearm was stored in the residence of the victim
- 47% of high school kids and 22% of middle school kids said they could get a gun

- 6% of high school kids said they had carried a gun to school within the last 30 days
- 72% of parents think their kids would not handle a gun without their permission

Gun Storage

The risks to our children from unsafe gun storage practices are significant. Without any exaggeration, the way a gun is stored can make the difference between life and death. Tragedies occur on a daily basis involving unlocked firearms that are easily accessible to young people, either at their own homes or the homes of their relatives or neighbors. These tragedies could very well of had been avoided if the adult in the home had taken the time to unload the gun and store it in a locked container along with the guns ammunitions.

Children have a natural curiosity, especially when it comes to guns. Parents should not lull themselves into a false sense of security on this matter, even if they have spoken to their children about guns. Judy Shaw of Boston's Children's Hospital says, "Any small child who picks up a gun...is going to put a finger in the trigger and click it." All parents must take common sense steps to protect children, both by talking to them about guns and by unloading and locking all guns so that a child or teen cannot access them without direct adult supervision.

GET UNLOADED



available for free or for a small cost.

To ensure the safety of children, all gun owners should:

- unload and lock up their guns
- lock and store ammunition separately
- hide keys where children are unable to find them

There are a variety of ways and devices for securing your firearm. Though safes seem to provide the most security, many people prefer locks, which are often

There are three good places to start looking for a gun-lock distribution program in your area:

- your local police department
- your local SAFE KIDS Coalition. To find the closest one to you call 202-662-0660 or click on the following link (hold down the CTRL key and click)
http://www.safekids.org/state_display.cfm
- Project Homesafe, a national gun-lock distribution program. Call 800-726-6444 to see if there's a Home Safe program in your area.

Two Examples of Trigger Locks



[Distinguishing Between Fantasy and Reality](#)

Many parents declare their homes a “no gun” zone, free from all real or toy guns. That’s a legitimate choice. However, children go to great lengths to create guns for play. Everything from sticks to plastic building blocks arranged into Space Ships are fair game for a child’s imagination.

A healthy imagination is a healthy trait in a child. However the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy also blinds the child that cannot distinguish between Hollywood make-believe action and his or her behavior in the play room. This blindness is a tragedy waiting to happen.

Never assume the child knows the difference. As a parent you cannot begin too early in your child’s development in learning the difference between reality play and the fantasy world of entertainment.

Make sure your child knows the difference between a toy gun and a real gun. Tell your child that guns used to create movies or on the video game screen are toys. Make them absolutely aware that BB guns, air guns, and firearms – rifles, pistols and shot guns – are not toys.

If you allow your child to play with toy guns, use the toy gun to demonstrate proper behavior with real guns.

Periodically, when you watch T.V. and see an action movie, quiz them on the gun handling practices of the characters! This will help the principles of safe firearm handling become second nature to your child.

Practice What You Preach

Ultimately, you set the guidelines for your child's behavior. Once you are comfortable with storage and handling procedures at home, insist that they be honored at all times, whether you're at home or away.

These precautions still apply even if you have no children. If your children have grown to adulthood and left home there's always the possibility that a neighbors child, or a grandchild may come visit. Practice safety at all times. Remember that gun safety in the home is a one-way street. Follow the rules you set for your children. Make sure that what you say and what you do is the same.

A Note for Gun Owning Parents

1. Gun safety begins with you

If you own guns, use common sense. Keep your guns and ammunition inaccessible to your child as well as curious playmates.

2. Don't leave firearms lying around

A toddler can stumble across them. And never assume that simply because a very young child lacks finger strength that they can't pull the trigger. A child's thumb has twice the strength of the other fingers. When a child's thumb pulls the trigger, invariably the barrel of the gun is pointing at the child's face. Get the picture?

3. Think about gun storage from your child's point of view

Are the places you think are safe from a toddlers reach, really out of reach? Ever seen a child use a drawer to climb? They use the drawer as a stepping stool to climb the dresser!

Ammunition, shotshells, and cartridges are not something that should be played with by a child. Keep your storage as inaccessible as your firearm.

[A Note for Parents Who Do Not Own Guns](#)

Are you afraid of guns or opposed to guns for personal or political reasons? You're not alone. Whether or not you've vowed to keep guns away from your kids and out of the house, this guide to gun safety was written for you as well.

As your child's primary care giver, you owe it to them to prepare for the chance that they will encounter a gun. If you teach them the basics of gun safety, you will be in a better position to help your child if he or she should happen to find a gun and no adult is on scene.

To control such a situation safely, you must have knowledge. That's why we urge you and every parent to read and practice the principles of firearm safety.



Safety Review

Safe Gun Storage

Don't dismiss the need to store guns safely. The consequences can cause serious injury or death. Follow these guidelines to keep firearms away from all unauthorized persons:

1. Always remove ammunition from guns.
2. Assure no unauthorized persons have access to your gun.
3. Place ammunition in a locked location, separate from guns. When deciding where to store ammunition, remember to select a secure place that is out of sight and reach of children.
4. Secure unloaded firearms with a gun lock, gun alarm or other type of tamper-proof device. These might render the gun inoperable.
5. Store unloaded guns in a gun cabinet, safe, or locked gun vault. Remember to place a locked storage case where children can't find it.
6. Keep gun storage keys away from the "every day" keys.

Figure 1 Handgun Safe



Figure 2 Large Gun Safe



Safe Gun Handling

Take responsibility for gun ownership. Learn how to handle a gun safely. One careless act with a firearm can result in a deadly mistake.

1. Do not allow untrained or unauthorized persons to handle guns.
2. Always handle fire arms as if they were loaded.
3. Keep guns pointed in a safe direction. Never point a gun at someone. Remember that bullets can ricochet off or penetrate walls, ceilings, doors, windows and other surfaces and objects.
4. Do not allow children, teenagers or adults to play with guns or handle them like toys.
5. Read all instruction manuals completely before using any firearm and take a gun safety course.
6. Teach children the basic elements of gun safety and instruct them on what to do if they find or see a gun. Tell them, “Never play with guns. If you find one, leave it alone and tell a grown up”.
7. Guns can be a natural curiosity for children. Repeat the “Don’t play with guns” message frequently. Reinforce it by quizzing them on what they would do if they found a gun.

Key Points for Children to Remember

Practice the following four simple steps with your young children:

- 1. STOP**
- 2. DON’T TOUCH**
- 3. LEAVE THE AREA**
- 4. TELL AN ADULT**

A gun in the home is not uncommon considering that half the homes in America have one. When gun safety isn’t practiced in these homes, lives can be destroyed and lost: husbands, wives, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and friends. Often times these needless deaths can be prevented.

You can help save lives! Practice gun safety in the home. Tell your neighbors, friends and relatives to spread the message throughout the community.