Gun Safety for Children

Guns are the number 1 cause of death for children and teenagers in the US.

Approximately every 40 minutes, a child or teenager is injured by a gun. Children who live in a home with a gun are at 2 times the risk of homicide and 3 times the risk of suicide. Increased gun sales and isolation during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic increase the risk of youth gun-related injuries. Caregivers can prevent gun-related injuries by talking to their children about gun safety and removing guns from the home or safely storing guns if they are present.

Gun Safety
The safest home for a child is one without guns. The absence of guns in the home is the most effective way to prevent gun-related injuries. If a family decides to keep guns in the home, the guns should be stored safely. Safe storage means that the gun is unloaded, the gun is locked in a safe or with a trigger lock, ammunition is stored and locked separately, and caregivers should ensure that children cannot access keys or codes to the gun locks or safes.

Tips for Talking to Your Child
• Make gun safety a part of your normal safety conversation, starting at an early age.
• Ask your child what they already know about guns and what questions they have.
• If your child finds a gun, they should stop, should not touch, and should tell a grown-up.
• Tell your child not to touch a gun, even if it looks like a toy.
• Online child-friendly videos can help guide the conversation.
• Repetition is key. Talk about gun safety routinely and add age-appropriate information as your child matures.
• Sign a family safety pledge to show you are committed to gun safety.

What Else Can Caregivers Do?
Ask if there are guns in the homes where your children play. More than one-third of unintentional shootings occur in the homes of relatives, friends, or neighbors. Also talk to your child about gun violence on social media, TV, and video games. Children may not realize that in real life, guns can hurt people so it is important to differentiate screen violence vs real life.

Ask your pediatrician for advice on gun safety, including how to talk to your child and options for safe gun storage. If your child is interested in shooting sports, talk to your pediatrician about whether your child is mature enough to handle a lethal weapon. Any minor (younger than 18 years) using a firearm is required to be supervised by an adult. Youth safety courses can be found through your local community or national organizations.

Most importantly, be SMART:
• Secure all guns in your homes and vehicles
• Model responsible behavior around guns
• Ask about presence of unsecured guns in other homes
• Recognize the role of guns in suicide
• Tell your peers to be SMART

For More Information
Be Smart: https://besmartforkids.org/
Project ChildSafe: https://projectchildsafe.org/

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