What Parents Should Know About Gun Safety in the Home and Vehicle

Guns are now the leading cause of death for children in the US.

Guns are even more lethal than motor vehicle crashes. The reasons for this gun violence increase in children are multiple, including a rapid rise in gun purchases, an increase in depression and anxiety in children and adolescents, and widespread stress from a global pandemic. The causes of these injuries and deaths vary by age. Younger children are more commonly injured unintentionally. Curious toddlers can find guns and fire them quickly. Older children and adolescents are more likely to be harmed by homicide or suicide.

The most important factor for children being injured or killed by guns is having a gun in the home where a child lives or the car where a child rides. Adults must make sure their guns are stored safely to prevent access by a child or adolescent. There are gun locks, safes, and other techniques to promote safer storage. As an additional safety measure, caregivers should strongly consider removing guns entirely from the home or vehicle, especially when children are older than about 11 years. These youths know how to find and access guns, even if they are stored safely. Considering the increase in mood disorders and risk of suicidal behaviors in older children and adolescents, they should not be around guns.

Parents and caregivers should follow the Be SMART framework to improve gun safety:

S: Secure all guns in your home and vehicle.

M: Model responsible behavior around guns.

A: Ask about unsecured guns in other homes.

R: Recognize the role of guns in suicide.

T: Tell others to Be SMART.

Common Misconceptions About Safe Gun Storage

1. "My kids don't know where the guns are stored." Children are naturally curious and keen observers. Much like they are good at finding birthday or holiday presents, they frequently know where guns are stored as well.

2. "My kids know to not touch or play with guns." Gun safety education is an important conversation to have with your child, whether you have guns in your home or your child visits friends who do. However, this conversation does not replace safe storage measures. Educational programs on gun safety often do not prevent injuries if they are the only safety measure used. Safe storage is crucial. Conversations with other parents and caregivers where your child visits are also important.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

https://besmartforkids.org
https://projectchildsafe.org

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