



## Why Kids Need to Know About Guns

*Every gun seized in suburban Montgomery County, Maryland, in 1999, except one, came from the child's home. "These kids did not obtain these guns from nefarious gunrunners in the dead of night, they got them from Mom and Dad's bedroom."*

***It's vital to start teaching kids about gun safety as early as age 4***, experts say. That's because as children grow, so do the odds that they will be injured by a gun. And by the time they're teens (when children are most resistant to safety message), the statistics on gun risks become staggering.

***More teenagers die as a result of guns than from all natural diseases combined.*** Teens are also most likely to be murdered. Usually the murderer is not a stranger or a gang member but a friend or acquaintance. Guns account for 55 percent of teen suicides, which have tripled since the 1950's.

"In late adolescence, many kids are very impulsive," explains James Mercy, Ph.D., a researcher at the Centers for Disease Control. "Teenagers who commit suicide are not as driven by depression as adults are." If a child has suicidal thoughts and access to a gun, they are more likely to die.

Here are four precautionary measures to keep kids safe from firearm injury, suggested by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence.

1. **Keep Guns Far Away From Your Children** - If you own a gun, remember that keeping it safe requires constant assessment as your child progresses developmentally. Since kids are so attracted to guns, you can't count on them to follow safety rules, and as they get older they become very adept at finding them. By adolescence, kids "seek guns in very sophisticated ways," says the AAP's Murray L. Katcher, M.D., Ph.D.
2. **Keeping Your Child Away From Guns Isn't Enough** - Kids need to be taught to be aware of gun dangers, just as they need to learn about wearing seat belts and not playing with matches. The AAP recommends that children be told never to touch a gun while unsupervised and to notify an adult immediately if they see a gun or hear another child talking about one. The message should be repeated periodically and parents should also talk to kids about the difference between guns on TV and real guns.
3. **Talk To Your Kids** - about ways to solve arguments and fights without guns or violence.
4. **Be Extremely Cautious** about allowing your child to participate in shooting activities.

The best way to protect children against gun violence is to remove all guns from the home. If parents feel they must have one or more guns in the home, there will always be some dangers. **The following actions are crucial to lessen the dangers.**

- Store all firearms unloaded and uncocked in a securely locked container. Only the parents should know where the container is located.
- Store the guns and ammunition in separate locked locations.
- For a revolver, place a padlock around the top strap of the weapon to prevent the cylinder from closing, or use a trigger lock; for a pistol, use a trigger lock.
- When handling or cleaning a gun, never leave it unattended, even for a moment; it should be in your view at all times.

**Even if parents don't own a gun, they should check with parents at other places where their children play,** to make sure safety precautions are followed. In a study of accidental handgun shootings of children under 16, nearly 40% of the shootings occurred in the homes of friends and relatives. The tragedies occurred most often when children were left unsupervised.

Children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral problems may be more likely than other children to use guns, against themselves or others. Parents who are concerned that their child is too aggressive or might have an emotional disorder may wish to seek an evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

For more information about gun safety issues and guidelines write Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1225 "I" Street, N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20005.



Child Abuse Prevention Council  
of Sacramento, Inc.  
Child Abuse Prevention Center  
4700 Roseville Road  
North Highlands, CA 95660  
Tel: (916)244-1900 Fax: (916)244-1950  
[www.capcsac.org](http://www.capcsac.org)