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## Gun Safety with Young Children

Every year, unintentional firearm injuries kill about 400 children each year, and over 3,000 children sustain nonfatal injuries. Most parents are concerned about the safety of their children, and do their best to provide them with a safe environment, including using car seats, seat belts, life preservers, bicycle helmets and gates on stairs, etc. Unfortunately, too many parents forget about gun safety though.

Eighty percent of these shootings involve boys, and many incidents occur when a child discovers a gun in the home while playing with a friend or a sibling. Approximately 40% of American households contain 1 or more firearms. Despite the risk of unintentional discharge and other adverse incidents, as many as 13% of gun-owning families keep at least 1 gun loaded and unlocked. This is especially true when the weapon is kept for protection. It is important to keep in mind that a firearm in the home is significantly more likely to kill or injure a family member or friend than an intruder.

Many parents incorrectly assume that their child is educated about gun safety can tell the difference between a real gun and a toy gun and would know not to handle a real gun. A study in the June 2001 issue of Pediatrics showed this to not be true. 29 groups of boys aged 8-12 years were observed in a room where a real but unloaded gun was hidden. Many of the children found and handled the gun, and half of the children actually pulled the trigger.

Most of the children that handled the gun and pulled the trigger had previously received gun safety education. This study helps prove that to keep your children safe and prevent firearm related injuries, it is important to restrict their access to guns, either by not having a gun in the home or by storing and locking it properly.

### How To Deal With A Firearm In A Home

- Proper storage of a gun includes keeping the gun in a gun safe, lock box, or a locked cabinet or drawer. The gun should also be stored unloaded with the bullets locked separately.
- Other steps you can take to ensure gun safety include:
  - Use a gun lock or trigger lock. Many communities also have free gun lock and/or trigger lock give away programs.
  - Make sure that your children do not have access to the keys used to lock your guns and bullets.
  - Teach your children to not handle guns without adult supervision.
  - Avoid letting your children play with realistic toy guns and non-powder firearms, such as pellet guns, air guns, air rifles and BB guns.
- Even if you don't have a gun in your own home, it is important to educate your children about firearm safety in case they discover a gun outside the home or in the homes of their friends. They should know the 4 steps of gun safety, including:
  - Stop!
  - Don't Touch.
  - Leave the Area.
  - Tell an Adult.
- You should also discuss gun safety with other parents or family members if your child spends time in their homes. It is not enough to assume that if they do have guns in the house that they have them stored properly.

As the American Academy of Pediatrics states in their book, "Injury Prevention and Control for Children and



Youth”, the risks of handgun ownership outweigh the benefits. If you have children in your house, then consider getting rid of your guns. If you must have a gun in the house, then at least store it and the ammunition separately, safely and properly.

If you do decide that you want to get rid of your guns to protect your children, you can look to see if a gun 'buy back' type program is available in your area. Or call the non-emergency number of your local police department and ask if they will pick it up.

It only takes one accident to have terribly tragic consequences. Don't let your children become one of these statistics. Lock up your firearms and ammunition properly.

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