



## **Firearm Safety**

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As a former gun owner, I am familiar with the enjoyment that comes from shooting a rifle. But, as a psychologist with 44 years of experience, I am also familiar with the damage guns can do. Psychologists are healthcare professionals who know gun deaths are often the result of impulsive behaviors. Anything we can do to impede that impulsive behavior diminishes the likelihood of a catastrophic outcome and safe gun storage is a step in that direction.

The United States has more guns per person than any other nation in the world and we have more than enough firearms in people's homes to supply every man, woman, and child with a gun. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that nearly 20,000 children and adolescents suffered a firearm related death in the United States between 2012 and 2022, and that in 2022, an average of seven children died by gunshot wounds each day. The CDC also noted that the most common causes of death among children and adolescents in the United States are accidents, homicide, and suicide, in that order. The immediate cause in each of those categories is very often a gun, often an adult-owned gun that has not been correctly stored. Experts typically offer this advice for gun storage:

- Guns should be unloaded when not in use.
- Guns should be kept in a strong, locked, cabinet, safe, or closet. The key should be in a hidden location far from the guns.
- Ammunition should be stored in a different secure location.

Research demonstrates that safe gun storage significantly reduces self-inflicted injury and death because it reduces the frequency of impulsive acts. Additional information about safe gun storage can be found [here](#).

### **Keeping kids safe**

Childrens' natural curiosity puts them at high risk for injury in situations where guns are not securely stored. [Safekids.org](https://www.safekids.org) offers the following suggestions for keeping children safe around guns:

- Explain to your kids how a gun they see on television or a video game is different from a gun in real life. "A gun, in real life, can really hurt people."
- Teach kids that if they see or find a gun to immediately tell an adult about it. Urge them not to touch it.

- Store your own guns securely, and talk to other family members and the parents of your child's friends about how to safely store any firearms they may own.

## How to talk to others about gun safety

What can you do to protect your child when they visit places that might have a firearm in the home? The same thing you'd do about any potentially dangerous situation: call the other kid's parents and politely ask pertinent questions. With a swimming pool, for example, you might ask about parental supervision. If your child is going to be transported in a car, who is driving? If you're concerned about the possibility of a gun in the home, [Brady United](#) suggests that a direct approach is best: *"My kid is pretty curious, and our doctor recommended that I ask — is there an unlocked gun where my child plays?"*

You may also be concerned about the safety of friends or other family members around guns. Brady United offers these ideas for addressing other situations of concern:

- **Checking in on a depressed or angry friend:** *"I know you've been having a hard time lately and wanted to ask, how do you store your gun?"*
- **Teens taking their first babysitting job:** *"Is there an unlocked and/or loaded gun in your home?"*
- **Young adults moving into a group home:** *"Does anyone own a gun? If so, how is it stored?"*
- **When considering the care of an elderly family member, especially those who may suffer from a form of dementia:** *"Do we need to rethink how we safely store their guns?"*

Whether we like it or not, it seems that guns are going to stay a part of American life for the foreseeable future. We're not going to be able to stop all the needless firearm deaths, but we can certainly make a dent in the problem. Secure your guns, and encourage friends and relatives to do the same.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*