

Basic Tips for Firearm Safety

(not intended or implied to be a complete list. For more, see the links listed below).

- 1. Always lock your firearms when they are not being used. Lock ammunition in a safe place away from firearms. At an age-appropriate time, show your children a gun, and explain what it can do. You do not have to teach that the gun is "bad," only that it is a tool that can be dangerous in the wrong hands. Nevertheless, do not assume that your child will not find your gun, will not be able to fire your gun, will not know how to make it work, or will remember the lessons you have taught. Very small children have fired guns accidentally. "I told them not to touch it" is not a good defense.**
- 2. Always assume that your firearm is loaded – and handle it that way – even if you are absolutely certain you have emptied all the bullets. Many people have been killed by a bullet accidentally left in the chamber. "I didn't know it was loaded" is not a good defense.**
- 3. Use a good locking device that is appropriate for the children living in your house. Do not depend on it as a sole safety measure. "I didn't think he knew how to work the lock" is not a good defense.**
- 4. Never ever point a firearm at anyone in fun. Always point your firearm in a safe direction. Remember that a wall is not a safe direction. A distant tree in a public woods is not a safe direction. An animal that you can't clearly identify is not a safe direction. Bullets easily go through most walls and can injure or kill someone on the other side. It's easy to miss the tree and hit a person hiking. Hunters have accidentally killed horseback riders, thinking they were deer. You are liable for wherever your bullets go. "I didn't know she was on the other side" is not a good defense.**
- 5. Teach your children that if they see a gun, they should not touch it, and they should immediately leave the area to go tell an adult. Teach them that guns are not toys, and that if a friend wants to show them a gun, they should immediately leave the area and go tell an adult. Impress on your child that this is not tattling -- this could easily save the friend's life or your child's own life. Do not avoid teaching these important lessons to your child or pretend that guns do not exist. They do, and they can be dangerous in the wrong hands or if handled improperly.**
- 6. Do not assume that other adults think the same way you do. Before letting your child play at someone's house, ask if there are firearms in the home and where they are. It's a difficult question to ask – particularly of people you barely know – but asking this question could save your child's life. Remember that other adults have guns in their home. Other adults lock guns and ammunition together. Other adults keep loaded guns in a nightstand next to their bed or even under their pillow. Other adults have not taught their children important lessons about guns. These other adults will include people you wouldn't think would own guns. "I didn't even know they had a gun" will not bring your child back to life.**

National Ask Day -- August 20, 2001, was the first National Ask Day. Sponsored by PAX, a nonprofit organization, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the campaign is designed to encourage parents to ask neighbors about guns in the home before sending children there to play. According to PAX, more than 40 percent of American homes with children in them also have guns. Many of these weapons are kept loaded and within reach of a determined child.

Many parents are reluctant to ask about the presence of guns because they're afraid to offend their friends and neighbors. But in Good Housekeeping's September 2001 issue, Ann Marie Crowell (whose son Brian was shot to death at a friend's house) offers this advice: "I know a quick cure for embarrassment: Close your eyes and imagine life without your child." For more on the ASK Campaign, see the PAX excerpts in our Expert Voices section.

For more on firearms, firearm law, and protecting your child:

Safer Child's page on Hunting Safety

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF)

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) - KIDS page - list several resources for educating children about guns and gun safety.

Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (ATF)

American Academy of Pediatrics - April, 2000 - policy statement

Project HomeSafe

PAX: Real Solutions to Gun Violence - information on the ASK Campaign

National Rifle Association

The NRA's Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program

Remington Safety Center

Americans for Gun Safety Foundation

LOCKSAF - a gun storage device. Enter saferchild15 as a discount code when you purchase a LOCKSAF and receive 15% off the suggested retail price. See the LOCKSAF customer reviews page for our review of this device.

KidsHealth - explains the gun issue and offers suggestions to protect your child.

National SAFE KIDS Campaign - information and tips for protecting your child.

Expert Gavin de Becker discusses having guns in the home

See the Safer Child Expert Voices section for excerpts from the ASK Campaign information.

Safer Child Communication page