



Crime Prevention

Norwalk Police Department

Gun Safety for Children

Why Teach Your Child Gun Safety?

As a parent, you are responsible for your child's safety as well as for teaching values and good judgment to your child. There are guns in approximately one-half of U.S. households, amounting to almost 200 million guns. Even if no one in your family owns a gun, chances are that someone you know does. Your child could come in contact with a gun at a neighbor's house or when playing with friends.

When Should You Teach Your Child Gun Safety?

There is no perfect age to talk with your child about gun safety. You, as a parent, must be the judge. A good time to introduce gun safety is when your child starts acting out "gun play" or asking questions about guns. Answer his or her questions. If you don't know the answers, contact a knowledgeable person. Talk with your child about guns, their uses and history, and answer your child's questions honestly and openly. Once you remove the mystery surrounding guns, your child won't see a gun as an object of curiosity, and a potential accident may be avoided.

What Should You Teach Your Child About Gun Safety?

Teach your child to Always Be Safe. Explain to your child that he or she should not touch a gun unless you are present and/or give your permission. If your child sees a gun, he or she should follow the basic safety measures of the Eddie Eagle ® Elementary Gun Safety Education Program.

STOP! DON'T Touch, LEAVE the Area, TELL an Adult.

In today's society, where adult supervision is not always possible, the direction to LEAVE the area if your child sees a gun is essential. Under some circumstances, "area" may be understood to be a room if your child cannot physically leave the apartment or house. TELL an adult emphasizes that children should seek out a trustworthy adult, such as a neighbor, police officer, or teacher if a parent or guardian is not immediately available.

Pretend Versus Real Life

Children see guns on TV and in the movies. This is entertainment. Make sure that your child understands the difference between pretend and real life. Actors on television use play guns. They pretend to be wounded and to die. After the show, they get up and appear in other films or on other TV shows. Don't assume that your child knows that. Explain it! Make certain your child knows the difference between a toy gun and a real gun. Guns used on television are toys. Cap guns and plastic squirt guns are toys. Guns such as BB guns and firearms such as pistols, rifles, and shotguns are not toys, they are real guns. They must never be confused with toy guns. If you allow your child to play with toy guns, use them to demonstrate safe gun handling.

Gun Safety is Common Sense

Whether or not you own a gun, it is important that you know the rules of safe gun handling so that you can ensure that these rules are followed.

- Always Keep the Gun Pointed in a Safe Direction. Whether you are shooting or simply handling a gun, never point the muzzle at yourself or others. Common sense will tell you which direction is the safest.
- Generally, it is safest to point the gun either upward or toward the ground.
- Always Keep Your Finger Off the Trigger Until Ready to Shoot. When handling a gun, people have a natural tendency to put their finger on the trigger, don't do it!
- Always Keep the Gun Unloaded Until Ready to Use. If you do not know how to check to see if a gun is unloaded, LEAVE IT ALONE and get help from someone who does know. Many accidents occur because someone thought a gun was unloaded. Keep all guns unloaded until ready to use.

Ammunition

Ammunition is not a toy. Cartridges and shells contain a chemical propellant. Ammunition should be securely stored and treated with the same safety precautions as a gun.

If You Own a Gun...

Owning a gun is a very personal decision. If you choose to own a gun, you have the responsibility to set a positive example for your child.

- Keep your gun and ammunition securely stored where a child or any other unauthorized person cannot reach it.
- Always follow the safe gun handling rules.
- Answer your child's questions about guns openly and honestly. Don't make a gun an object of curiosity for a child.

If you own a gun and do not know how to operate it, contact someone knowledgeable and have him or her teach you. An uneducated adult can be as dangerous as a curious child.

Some Facts About Guns

It is estimated that there are approximately 60 million gun owners in the United States. People own guns for many reasons: hunting, personal protection, collecting, and target shooting. Shooting is an Olympic sport and has been since the modern Olympic Games began in 1896. According to the National Safety Council, 230 children under the age of 15 were killed in firearm-related accidents in 1991 (the most recent statistic available). Since the 1940s, however, the number of accidental shooting fatalities has declined more than 50 percent. This decrease has been attributed to safety education programs. An increased awareness of gun safety is not good enough; even one death is too many. You can make a difference by being a responsible parent. Reinforce safe gun behavior with your child.

If You or Your Child Would Like to Learn More...

You may wish to extend your child's knowledge of gun safety to safe handling and use, particularly if your child shows an interest in learning to shoot. But only you can determine if and when your child is ready. Just as there is no standard age to begin teaching your child gun safety, a child's attitude and physical and emotional development are key factors in determining when to teach your child how to handle guns and to shoot. Once the decision has been made, remember the safety rules:

- Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.
- Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.
- Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.
- ***Above all, be a positive role model for your child.***