

# Guns in the Home

By: Judy Schaechter, MD, MBA, FAAP

Did you know that roughly a third of U.S. homes with children have guns? In fact, nearly 2 million children live with unlocked, loaded guns. Parents may not realize what a serious injury risk a gun in the home is, especially for children.



Even young toddlers are capable of finding unlocked guns in the home, and they are strong enough to pull the trigger. Unintentional shootings happen to children of all ages. At least 285 (<https://everytownresearch.org/notanaccident/>) children got ahold of a gun and inadvertently shot themselves or someone else in 2017. Adolescents, in particular, are at a higher risk for suicide when there is a gun in the home. In fact, a gun in the home is 43 times more likely to be used to kill a friend or family member than a burglar or other criminal.

## The Most Effective Way to Keep Kids Safe

**The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advises that the safest home for a child is one without guns.** The most effective way to prevent unintentional gun injuries, suicide and homicide to children and adolescents, research shows, is the absence of guns from homes and communities.

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**285 children**  
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- [EverytownResearch.org/NotAnAccident](https://EverytownResearch.org/NotAnAccident)



## What to Do If You Do Keep a Gun in Your Home

For families who decide to keep guns in the home, many studies show that teaching kids about gun safety, or to not touch a firearm if they find one, is not enough.

Parents can reduce the chances of children being injured, however, by following important safety rules:

- **Safe storage.** All guns in your home should be **locked and unloaded, with ammunition locked separately.** Make sure children and teens can't access the keys or combinations to lock boxes or gun safes. And remember not to keep loaded, unlocked guns in the car, either.
- **In use.** When using a gun for hunting or target practice, keep the safety catch in place until you are ready to fire it. Before setting the gun down, always unload it. As much as a child may want to take a turn shooting, this is not a good idea. No matter how much instruction you may give about how to safely shoot a gun, children are not capable or responsible enough to handle a potentially lethal weapon.

# Ask About Guns in *Other* Homes Where Your Child Plays

More than a third of all unintentional shootings of children take place in the homes of their friends, neighbors, or relatives.

Take steps to help ensure your children and their play mates do not come across an unsecured gun while they play:

- ([/English/news/Pages/Is-There-A-Gun-Where-Your-Child-Plays-Asking-Can-Save-Lives.aspx](#)) Add **this question to your playdate checklist**. Even if you don't have guns in your own home, ask (<http://askingsaveskids.org/>) about guns and safe storage at the other homes they visit. Just as you'd ask about pets, allergies, supervision and other safety issues before your child visits another home, add one more important question: *"Is there an unlocked gun in your house?"* If there is, reconsider allowing your child to play there or talk to them about keeping the guns unloaded and locked.
- **Talk to your children.** Remind your kids that if they ever come across a gun, they must stay away from it and tell you immediately.



## Guns (in Media) in the Home

Make sure your children understand that gun violence they may see on TV, in movies and in video games they play at home or friends' homes is not real. They need to be told—and probably reminded again and again—that in real life, children are killed and hurt badly by guns. Although the popular media ([/English/news/Pages/Virtual-Violence-Impacts-Children-on-Multiple-Levels.aspx](#)) often romanticize gun use, children must learn that these weapons can be extremely dangerous.

# GUN SAFETY and CHILDREN

If you own a firearm, the AAP recommends it be **stored unloaded, locked up** (lock box, cable lock, or firearm



About **1/3 of the homes with children** in the United States have a gun. Many are



safe), with the ammunition stored separately.

stored  
**loaded  
and/or unlocked.**

Every day,

**78 children,**



teens and young adults are **injured or killed** by guns in the United States.

= *death*   = *injury*

Source: CDC WISQARS database including data for all races, ages 0-21, from 2013-2016.

The risk of dying by suicide is **4 to 10 times higher**

in homes with guns. If you have **a teen who is at risk for suicide**, remove guns and ammunition from your house.



Children as young as



**3 years** may be strong enough to **pull the trigger** on a handgun.



The **safest home** for children and teens is one without guns.



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## Additional Information:

- **Where We Stand: Gun Safety** (</English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Gun-Safety.aspx>)
- **Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population** (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-2481>) (AAP Policy Statement)
- **Asking Saves Kids** (<http://askingsaveskids.org/>)

## About Dr. Schaechter:



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