

Teaching Young Children Gun Safety

This article sets out one way to teach gun safety rules to children. However, this is not the only way to teach gun safety rules. Every parent and adult knows his or her child's abilities, propensities, personality, and characteristics that make this or any other learning technique suitable for each child. Each parent and adult who uses this article must interpret and apply the information to suit the training needs of his or her child and assume the responsibility for so doing.

Safety rules for children

Gun safety for young children should include the basic gun safety rules:

If you find a gun don't touch it.

Go and tell an adult you trust that you found a gun.

These rules, if followed, can keep a child from picking up a gun, get them away from the gun (in case a playmate picks it up), and will alert an adult to the situation.

Rules for teaching children gun safety

Follow basic rules for teaching children gun safety:

NEVER USE REAL GUNS OR AMMUNITION AS TRAINING AIDS.

NEVER KEEP A REAL GUN IN YOUR HOME WHERE A CHILD MAY FIND IT.

DON'T LET THE CHILDREN PLAY WITH TOY GUNS.

DON'T TEACH A CHILD WHO IS NOT YOUR CHILD UNLESS YOU HAVE THE EXPRESS, WRITTEN CONSENT OF THAT CHILD'S PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN.

Teaching gun safety

Role playing can be used to teach gun safety rules to children. Here is one way to do this.

1. Cut out photos of guns from magazines to use as props. If you don't have gun magazines in your home, ask a friend for an old issue or buy a gun magazine at the news stand. (It's a small investment to help keep your child safe.) Choose photos of different looking handguns that are approximately the size of real guns. Cut around the outline of the gun removing the background from the photo.
2. Set a time to talk to your child about guns and gun safety. **If you are a gun owner:** Explain your views on guns (you are a hunter and enjoy a sport that provides food for the family, you have a gun for protection, you have a gun as a tool required for your law enforcement job, you are a gun collector, gun dealer, or gunsmith, or whatever). Also explain that other people have different views about guns and that some people don't like guns and feel they are bad things.

If you don't own a gun: Explain why you don't have a gun in your home (you don't like guns and think they are dangerous items, you don't think guns should be in homes with children, or what ever your reason is). Also explain that other people have different views about guns than you have and that they may have guns for some lawful reason (even if you don't agree with it) and that your child may be in a friend's home where the parents do own guns.

Explain that guns are not toys and that they can cause very serious injury and can kill people and that children should never touch or play with guns. (Each parent must decide if they want their child to learn how to shoot a BB gun or air gun under appropriate training and supervision, but this is a different topic.) Explain that gun accidents can happen very quickly and easily.

Explain that what they see on television isn't real and that violence isn't glamorous or fun.

Ask your child what he or she knows about guns. If your child has questions about guns, that you can't answer, find a hunter safety class or gun safety class that is appropriate for the age of your child and attend it together, even if you don't own guns the more you know about them the safer you and your child can be if you encounter a gun at a friend's home.

3. Explain the gun safety rules to your child. Get your child to repeat the rule back to you. Ask if he or she has any questions about the rule.

Prepare ahead of time how you will address issues such as:

Will your child get into trouble for "snooping" in your home or that of a friend or neighbor? Will this fear prevent

your child from reporting finding a gun? Will you punish your child for snooping or reward him or her for reporting finding a gun?

If your child is at a friend's home and find a gun, should your child tell his or her friend's parents or come home and tell you?

If your child finds a gun outside, on the street, in a park, or any place at all, should your child tell you, a teacher, a police officer, or someone else? What situations will help your child make the decision who to go to and tell about finding the gun?

If your child is with friends who want to play with a gun, how can your child leave and tell on their friends without being viewed as a tattletale or afraid?

If your child can't find an adult, or an adult they trust, what should she or he do?

4. Set a time to role play. Show your child the photos of the guns you cut from the magazine. Don't let the child hold the photos, treat the photos like guns, keeping them pointed away from yourself and the child. Explain that you are going to put these "guns" in places that people may keep guns and when the child sees one, he or she must not touch it and immediately come and tell you or another adult in your home.

For young children you can start the practice by putting the "gun" in an obvious place in the room you are in and let them practice seeing it and coming to tell you. Then place it in a different room and let them go and discover it and come and tell you. Make sure the child never touches the gun. You can do this by having him or her say aloud "Don't touch" when they see the gun. Repeat the role play two or three times a day, a couple days a week, for a month or so. Repeat it every few weeks for a few more months. Then monthly thereafter.

If your child picks up the gun during the game, immediately, calmly say "Stop, gently put the gun on the floor, come here to me." Then talk about the danger of touching guns and repeat the gun safety rule. Have your child repeat the rule and answer any questions about the rule. Do the role play again.

When you think your child has learned the safety rule, put the gun photo in a place the child will likely come across it at a time when you haven't set up a role playing session. If your child comes and tells you he or she found a gun, congratulate him or her. If he or she comes to you carrying the gun, you need to start over from the guns-are-dangerous lesson.

Variation

You can use toy guns instead of cut-out magazine photos of guns. If you do this, whenever you handle the gun you must follow basic gun safety rules of:

Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction when you pick up, hold, and set down the gun.

Keep your finger off the trigger.

Treat it like a real gun.

Store it in a safe place when it isn't being used for learning the gun safety rules.

Never let your child play with the gun as a toy.

Your child will see how you handle the gun. If you are careless and let the muzzle hang down and point at your leg as you walk, put your finger on the trigger, point it at the dog and say "bang," or some other un-safe behavior, that is what your child will learn.